

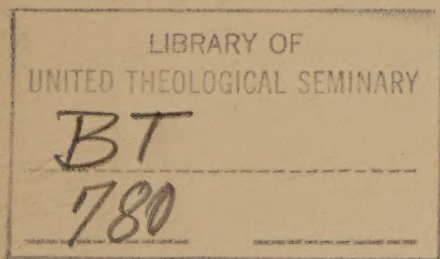
Ernest P. Sellars.

THE TWENTIETH HARTLEY LECTURE :

Christian Conversion

BY

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1920.

TO THE MEMORY
OF
My Father,
A PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL,
IN WHOSE STEPS
I HAVE SOUGHT TO TREAD.

FOREWORD.

WITH all the urgency of faith I have written this Lecture on Conversion at the bidding of my Church. The subject is of my own choosing, but I believe sincerely that I am obedient to the will of the Holy Spirit. The theme is one of immediate and imperative importance, and must be given a first place in preaching and worship, if we are not to surrender the evangelical glory which is our richest heritage. Methodism may sacrifice much, but she cannot live apart from the power, thrill and testimony of Conversion.

This Lecture has been written in crowded days, in which I have sought to maintain my pulpit in a City Church and discharge my public duties as President of the National Free Church Council. The pages show signs of haste, but I have not sought to secure literary polish so much as to be direct and even importunate in my plea for Conversion. I have written from my heart the message that holds me with increasing power in years of intense activity and strain. I have not shrunk from controversies, I have served my country as

best I could, but no passion is to me so alluring as that of winning souls for my Lord.

I have wilfully avoided technicalities and discursive elaboration ; I have refused to wander from my theme. I do not profess to be a theologian of authority, a psychologist of precision or a philosopher of daring. I do claim to have proved the Gospel of Conversion in my labours as a working Methodist preacher, than which I covet no higher calling.

I have high ambitions for Methodism and, if in this volume I can make some contribution to its Evangelical power throughout the world, I seek no other reward.

I cannot refrain from testifying to the generosity of my Liverpool Church, who have supported me in all the public demands that have been made upon my time and strength.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to my dear friend, Rev. J. G. Bowran, for revising the proofs and index, and relieving me from anxieties, which, through serious illness had become a burden I could not carry. He makes me still further his loving debtor by delivering the Lecture for me at Hull. I could desire no more loyal or eloquent voice to declare my passion and plea for conversion.

ARTHUR T. GUTTERY.

"ELMFIELD,"
SEFTON PARK,
LIVERPOOL.

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PART I.

THE FACT OF CONVERSION.

CHRISTIAN CONVERSION.

CHAPTER I.

The Evangelical Watchword.

THE term Conversion in this study will be limited to its religious significance, for the general term would lead us far afield into every phase of deed and thought. The word can be applied to a change of will, as when a nation of industrials and pacifists resolves on war, or a corporation swings from one mercantile career into another, or a man abandons the ambition of years to seek a new adventure. It is a change of viewpoint, as when the cynic grows kindly or the trustful sours into suspicion. It may be the result of travel, reading, or a new social contact, with which religion directly has nothing to do. It is often a revolution in relationships, as when Mr. Gladstone moved from the Toryism of Oxford to the Liberalism of Lancashire, or Mr. Chamberlain

swung from Republicanism to Imperialism. It is a change of circumstance rather than character; of direction more than motive. It may leave personality unmoved while it reverses its fashion and alters its trade. It is an incident which may leave but little trace on the vital fabric. It is a question of furnishings and equipment, and is the concern of the economist and teacher and reformer. It is a study for the psychologist more than a task for the evangelist. Its motives are convenient or profitable, they need not be sacred and spiritual. Mere change has no religious value. It may not involve progress at all, and in many cases is a freak as unmoral as St. Vitus' Dance. To study the play of circumstance and heredity upon the will is full of fascination, but its generalities are not the immediate concern of the preacher of Conversion. It may be possible to reduce psychology to mathematical certainty and to tame the vagaries of choice to an arithmetical total; but these do not affect the imperative of Conversion as we use the term in the speech of the sanctuary.

The Conversion we study is rooted in spiritual realities, and is a response to appeals which spring from a supernatural revelation. It admits to a new kinship and novel ambitions, which have a divine sanction. It creates a new ethic which transcends and often contradicts the morality of the market and the forum. It inspires a love and loyalty which are a perpetual miracle, and it floods life with decisive convictions which are more than

rational. It begins with the soul rather than society. It creates a new personality, even more than it demands a new environment. Its change is vital and not incidental. It is studied by the psychologist, but goes beyond his verdict. It is the hope of the reformer, but is never bound by his shibboleths. It is the redemption of society, but is an explosive energy which no civilization can harness. It is the expression of the human will, the cry of the human soul, reinforced by the powers of the Eternal God.

We limit our survey further by a real distinction between Conversion and the New Birth. We are not interested so much in theological technicalities as we are concerned not to confuse terms which are vitally related but really different. They are co-existent, and it is impossible to decide which has the priority. The one is subjective, the other is objective. In conversion man accepts the touch and obeys the will of God ; in regeneration the Spirit of Grace creates and witnesses to the new life in the receptive soul. The one is a command, the other is a gift. The command cannot be obeyed without the gift. Surrender is quite as much a response as it is a decision. Both are one in Salvation, but each is distinctive, and in thought we must keep them apart, if we would be clear in our conclusions. Dr. J. C. Lambert makes the distinction clear when he tells us that "conversion, as distinguished from regeneration, is an activity of the soul itself, and not an experience imposed from above."

We preach conversion ; we pray for the New Birth. The one is a moral act, the other is a divine benefaction.

The distinction has practical importance, and to overlook it is to condemn testimony to a confusion which makes much evangelism an hypnotic incantation, rather than an intelligent and forceful appeal. The Herald of Conversion is still the daysman between God and man. Both are needed in the supreme transaction of salvation and, be it said with reverence, each is helpless without the co-operation of the other. The result is a miracle and is never an accident. It is a deed most individual when most mutual. The converting message is always addressed to men, never to God. There is no heresy more accursed than that which declares or even suspects that God must be moved from His set purpose by the passion of our plea or the pressure of our will : God is Love : always Love, and Love for all, always. He has given the message and inspired its appeal, but even omnipotent Love is baffled till it is accepted by the willing mind and repentant heart. God in His supreme dealings with men pays strange reverence to the majesty of their will. No imposition of grace shall weaken choice. The New Birth alone would be but a biological incident on a higher plane, and would increase the celestial population without securing the sanctity of its character. We are "born again," "born from above," but it is with our consent. We are not angels but converts, and in the realm of redemption converts count for

more. We must ever pay homage to the human will. It may be perverted, diseased and polluted, but to it the evangelist makes his appeal, for it has within itself the secret of human destiny and the warrant of divine victory. There can be no saints, if there are no converts. Heaven knows no triumph till our congregations willingly turn their feet towards its shining portals. The limits of this volume will prevent us saying much about the New Birth, but its splendours will always gleam upon our eyes and show us the pathway we must tread.

Conversion is a term not easily defined. Dean Mason says,¹ "Conversion is perhaps not one of those words to which a very precise theological value can be assigned. It is harder to define conversion than it is, for instance, to define repentance, or regeneration or renewal."

The student, who is content with an analysis of words, will be at a loss when he faces the tremendous term conversion. It is the key-word of a campaign and not so much a problem for the study. It has never created a great literature, but it has inspired the most thrilling revolutions and the greatest social upheavals of history.

The difficulty of attaching to the term "a very precise theological value" lies in the vitality and therefore mystery of the fact. It is bigger and more restless than any definition. It refuses to be imprisoned in any system. Evangelists of all types, and preachers of all creeds, are driven beyond

¹ "The Ministry of Conversion," p. 1.

theological technique when they make the appeal for conversion. The Academy fears the word as the Sanhedrin feared our Lord, because it suggests yeasting energies which burst the old phrases in which mere learning puts its trust. The word has been too often associated with zeal and fanaticism to be welcome in cloistered studies. It is a fact and not a formula : often passionate and seldom precise. It is the travail of life more than a subject of speculation. It is a tragedy bursting into triumph and not an inference reaching its conclusion. It is war and not words. Its goal is a Cross, once hated and now beloved. Its passion is loyalty and not logic. It demands sweat of soul more than the student's midnight oil.

Few books have been written on Conversion ; and yet it is the basal fact of Christian experience. Upon its reality we establish the Holy Catholic Church and the Kingdom of God. The defence is offered that it is too mystic, personal, intimate and sacred for theological laboratories. It is an experience more than an expression. The same reasoning would forbid all investigation of life, love, God and worship. Life will never cease to be sacred and intimate, but science and philosophy trace its functions from birth to death, investigate its prenatal relations, and dig down into that subconsciousness where lie the founts of personality. Conversion professes to be the beginning of a new life. It is the birth-pang of personality into vital relations and experiences. It should be therefore studied with a thorough reverence that preachers

and people may be delivered from either poverty or extravagance in their treatment of this vital fact. Dr. Harnack says wisely,¹ "The Christian religion is directed to one particular, namely, eternal life here and now in the power of God and in His presence."

Conversion, as the acceptance of this eternal life, demands the most candid and careful investigation. God and man are both concerned in religion, and we shall be partial in our views of the divine if we ignore the human side of the great transaction. The supreme fact of the Incarnation should make impossible a divorce which has lasted far too long. The objective gift of Regeneration shall always receive our gratitude. The subjective act of Conversion shall never cease to claim our homage. We rejoice tremblingly in the Cross our Lord bore for us: we exult in the Cross which men accept for His sake. We believe in the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and we enter the victory of those who in Holiness respond to the cleansing witness. Conversion is more than the catch-word of a Revival, it is the human share of a redemption which is the marvel and mercy of the world.

Conversion may lack precise definition, but most of us possess in experience an interpretation which is sufficient for our moral and spiritual needs. It is a human decision that the new life made possible in God's mercy shall be actually realized in character and service. It is a choice, and is fundamentally

† "Das Wesen des Christentums," p. 8.

the same, however it may vary in form, circumstance and expression. We must look beneath the conditions, emotional or placid, instantaneous or gradual, revolutionary or evolutionary, and we shall find that Christian Conversion is always a choice, to live "that type of life which Jesus Christ lived, His attitude toward God, His attitude toward men. Not all who enter upon this life believe the same things or are conscious of the same ideals, or give expression to the life in the same terms of conduct. If this new spirit now becomes the hot place in a man's consciousness . . . the habitual centre of his personal energy, psychology pronounces him a Christian." To that definition our faith can say Amen.

Conversion can be identified by features which are always found, though they may vary in sequence and expression.

There is a new discovery of self. It is a revelation of polemics and depths never dreamed of. All disguise is pierced; conventionality and excuse are of no avail. The ego is seen with new eyes, and the discovery can be stated in no better fashion than when it is said of the Prodigal Son: "He came to himself." His old estimates of life, kinship and pleasure fell from him, and he awoke to a new knowledge which centred in self.

There is a new vision of the Divine. God becomes actual to consciousness. It may be in the form of a Law to be feared, a Power to be placated, or a Love to be welcomed. The literature of conversion is full of this feature from the earliest

mystics to our own day. God comes near. His voice is heard, His Cross is seen. It is always God in Christ that decides the will to conversion. This vision may have its extravagance and speak of lights, voices and psychic possession, but it is a potent vision all the time. What Mrs. Herman says of Mysticism is true of Conversion.¹ "That which makes it a genuine spiritual movement and experience, and not a mere theosophy, is its passionate, personal apprehension of Jesus Christ the Redeemer." The vision may be gentle as the dawn, or vivid as the lightning, but God is seen.

There is the sense of need. It may be scarlet with guilt, or drab with failure, or black with despair. The revelation of self in the white light of the divine presence smites heart and conscience with sin. That "conviction of sin," as our fathers called it, will declare itself in many ways, but it is discontent with self in all its gradations between the agony of terror, the remorse of blood and dull dissatisfaction. The Prodigal Son hungers as he never did before, when his mind discovers afresh the plenty and beauty of his father's house. Repentance, resolution and confession follow: "I will arise and go I will say to him, Father, I have sinned make me as one of thy hired servants."

All varieties of temperament and memory will show themselves in this supreme moment, but the decision is vitally one, however it may vary in accent and tone. Conversion is volitional, or it is

¹ "The Meaning and Value of Mysticism," p. 300.

nothing. Without the will it is unmoral and may become an ecstatic reverie which slips too easily into passive voluptuousness. The Convert chooses Christ as his personal Saviour before he can proceed to that fuller knowledge which is the Light of Life.

The end, or rather the beginning of the end, is the sense of release, power, life peace and joy. The wonders of a new creation are unveiled. The varieties of this experience are infinite. There may be impassioned joy declaring itself in shout and song and dance ; or there may be the thrill of exultation with which a new chivalry and daring adventure are welcomed ; or there may be a silent adoration and mute contentment which is willing to wait and adore. The "motif" is one, though tune and time may vary.

This is the vital change we call conversion. We shall avoid technical language, for we cannot be academic in face of this blazing fact. This is the Evangelical watchword. It overleaps our denominational boundaries and despises our dogmatic divisions. Protestant and Romanist, Anglican and Free Churchman, Calvinist and Arminian, are ashamed to quarrel in face of Conversion. Augustine and Luther, Jonathan Edwards and Wesley, Prof. W. James and D. L. Moody, are alike entranced by this key-word of triumph. Their time-tables do not agree ; they travel by different routes, but all are filled with glad amazement at the spectacle of Conversion and the New Birth becoming one in so great salvation.

Conversion may be quite distinct from doctrinal theology, but it always begins with the consciousness of need ; the vision of help and the realization of aid into a higher life. We must get back our watchword. We cannot wait till all its problems are solved and its mysteries cleared. When this fails, the nerve withers, the step lags, and the voice falters. Our Churches need conversions to repair their losses and recruit their ranks. Our Lord awaits the coming of those whom He has redeemed that His Kingdom may prevail on earth. Conversion is more than a luxury, it is the primary necessity of our race. It is more than a cry ; it is a conquest. It is no formula of the schools ; it is the basal fact on which we build our Temple. We must have Conversions or we perish, because the world has no use for us apart from Conversion. Revival is the only antidote of death. ¹“Except ye be converted ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

¹ Matthew xviii. 3.

CHAPTER II.

The Testimony of Scripture.

THE Bible is our supreme text-book on Conversion. No other literature can rival it in the thunder of its emphasis or the lightning of its revelation. It is unique in its presentation of the drama of God and Man. In judgment and redemption, in its call for decision and promise of life, it is final. In parable and picture, in vivid history and thrilling biography, it traces life from its beginnings through the shadow of sin, the arrest of conscience, the decision for righteousness, the battle for goodness, the life of the spirit and the reward of victory. It is social as well as individual, and shows us the home and nation converted when possessed by the divine message. It is revolutionary and progressive. It is a leaven fermenting in life, but its goal is wholesome and blessed. It is frank and fearless in its presentation of the worst, but it never fails to travel towards the Church, which shall establish the Kingdom of the ever-blessed God. The boldest witness and the greatest victories of Conversion have their inspiration and warrant in the Holy Scriptures.

It is the fashion to approach Conversion from the standpoint of psychology. We are told to study the conscious and subconscious self in the man and in the crowd. Our nature is dissected into rational and passional, and the most mystic experiences of life are labelled as super-biological specimens. We are not slow to acknowledge the debt we owe to men like James, Coe and Davenport, but we dare not slacken in the obedient reverence with which we listen to the Biblical account of Conversion. To abandon the mountain voices to discuss the theories of the classroom is to doom ourselves to mental confusion and moral sterility. It will be an ill day when Evangelists seek psychic phenomena, auto-suggestion, and the possibilities of the subliminal self at the expense of constant Bible study.

As a history it is matchless in its appeal to those hidden depths where decision is truly made. As a literature its impact upon conscience and will is tremendous : as a moral ideal and spiritual impulse it reaches the most secret nerve of life. It is more than definition can declare, it is the thought of God declared just as Christ was the love of God Incarnate. It is not a treatise, it is dynamic. It is more than a system, it is life and spirit. We champion no school of criticism. We are not concerned here with chronological details or discussions on authorship. We are not affected by controversies on the type and measure of its inspiration or infallibility. We make our simple confession that in the domain of Conversion the Bible is unique in

its revelation of the divine and human elements of that great transaction. The preacher who gives it a second place that he may secure conversions by appeals and arguments, which are novel, goes into battle unarmed and is naked before all the artillery of evil. The giants of Evangelism are ever nourished on the word of God.

The Evangel is heard in the Old Testament. The summons to repentance, the call to duty and sacrifice, and the promise of divine co-operation are found in both the law and the prophets. The story of the beginnings of earth and life, the tale of the kings, the song of the Psalms, are full of this message of God to men. The Old Testament, says Dr. Newton H. Marshall, is the "history of calls."¹ "Abraham is called from Ur of the Chaldees to begin a new life in Canaan. Moses is called from the Egyptian court to become herdsman and prophet and lawgiver, to lead his people into their promised land. Samuel is called to give a central God-consciousness to the Israelites when split up into many groups. David is called to give them a capital and a position of stable civilization amongst the other nationalities. Amos is called to denounce luxury and social injustice, Hosea to give his people the idea of God's fatherly love, Isaiah to uplift the ideal of the suffering servant of Jehovah. These and the many other men of hearing, or, as the Jews themselves put it, of holy vision,—seers, they were named,—were called that they might be constantly urging upon their nation the claims of

¹ "Conversion or the New Birth," pp. 17, 18.

the unseen, the sovereignty of God, and the sense that men must turn away from ways displeasing to God towards a new and better life."

It would be easy to lengthen the list. It is enough to affirm the principle that the great personalities of the Old Testament were witnesses of God to arouse the people to that moral self-consciousness, which is the first step in conversion. They were not always aware of their calling. In many cases they misread their mission, and in not a few instances they perverted an eternal message to immediate ends. Men like Balaam and Jonah sought to evade their calling, but by a kind of inexorable destiny they were driven to make their summons to the human conscience. It is solemnly impressive to see how God will compel a hearing. The decision is left to our freedom, but the message is His concern, and He will use unlikely and, if need be, unwilling messengers to arouse men from the apathy which is as fatal as death. The Old Testament shows us Evangelism in the Shadow. The altar is reared amid the scaffolding of ritual and detail. The splendour of the Cross and the vast liberties of the Spirit are not yet perceived, but it is Evangelism. Its appeal is infinitely pathetic when we contrast it with the full Gospel of the New Testament and the testimony of saintly generations.

Our homage is not weakened when we confess the limitations of the Old Testament as a text-book on Conversion. It is a book of precepts enforced by penalties and cheered by promises,

more than it is a power, a passion, and a principle which can afford to leave details to find their own settlement in the energy of a supreme devotion. It declares a dream rather than a deed. Its mercy-seat is local; its Shechinah is housed, and only fitfully has it the gleams of a Love that is universal and a Spirit which is free and viewless as the wind. It is religion rigorous more than redemptive. It is an alphabet forming syllables rather than a Gospel of indwelling life. It shows a pattern in the Mount, but the city of God is not yet built. In spite of these imperfections, it created in a provincial, jealous, petty people a religious consciousness in which Christ could be born, and which has proved the greatest force in human history. The path was trodden with laggard, wayward feet, but the seed of Abraham reached a supremacy which the proudest races may envy. The Conversion of Israel, though but partial, remains in its result the marvel of the world.

In the Old Testament Conversion was tribal and national, rather than personal. It was a mass movement, subject to all the errors and fickle reactions of such movements. The State and the Temple crushed the man, and even the Theocracy placed in jeopardy the value of the individual. They who resent the personal word in favour of the popular appeal would do well to take warning from the story of Israel.

The prophets were reformers more than evangelists. National policy dwarfed personal

piety. They had their eye upon foreign entanglements in the interests of a jealous God, rather than the surrender of the worshipper to a redeeming Lord. They were more set upon propaganda than salvation. There are brilliant and fitful exceptions to this rule, but most prophets need a generous exegesis to make them ideal heralds of conversion. Sir George Adam Smith is emphatic here. He says, ¹“They were enthusiasts for their people confine religion to the personal, it grows rancid, morbid. Wed it to patriotism, it lives in the open air, and its blood is pure. They counsel and rebuke David, they warn Rehoboam, and they excite Northern Israel to revolt. They overthrow and they set up dynasties. They offer the king advice on campaigns. Like Elijah, they take up against the throne the cause of the oppressed; like Elisha, they stand by the throne, its most trusted counsellors in peace and war.”

This judgment may be fully true of only a school of prophets, but all alike were liable to the degeneration, which easily follows absorption in public affairs. It is always dangerous to make the altar of worship the seat of national government.

They address their appeal to kings, priests, judges, rather than to the single wayfarer or simple cottager. Their revivals, which flamed most hotly, were often a dreary disappointment. The Law was read with public homage, but greed and vice remained. The Temple was gorgeous, but many who trod its courts were as whited sepulchres.

¹ “The Twelve Prophets,” pp. 25, 26.

Monotheism was restored, but the peoples lusted after the gods of flesh and wine. National disaster was more dreadful than personal sin. Even the reform of Josiah could not stay the doom that marched from the North. It drove ¹Habakkuk into his watch-tower to study the appalling paradox of national revival, which lacked ethical sincerity. It made inevitable the great captivity, which Israel entered as a nation, and from which it returned a Church. It is the mute sorrow of the silent centuries which separate Malachi from Mark and Matthew. In the Old Testament Conversion is a fact, but it is obscured by stern and local limitations.

None will deny the value of the Psalms as aids to devotion, but in their anguish or rhapsody, we fail to find a clear interpretation or consistent account of salvation. The Chronicles and the Books of Allegory and Question show us religion in its operation upon the life of communities or facing the tragic problems of powerful evil and tortured goodness. They are experimental and vital, and therefore are never out of date as long as men think and suffer, but the evangelical verity of conversion is only found with difficulty. In many moods we discover anger, scorn and the desire for vengeance, which it is hard to reconcile with the best instincts of the Christian conscience. Imprecations are not prayers of the highest order, and the detailed account of dynastic intrigues, palace revolutions and ruthless campaigns, distract us when we seek the radiant fact of Conversion.

¹ Habakkuk ii. 1.

This is not to deny the value of the Old Testament. It is a story of religious evolution we must never lose. It is a record, so frank and fearless, that it dares to declare the immaturity of a slowly developed religious consciousness. It is more a history than a Gospel, and the preacher, who would lead men and women into the crisis and certainty of Conversion, will need a fuller equipment than he can find in psalter or prophecy, chronicles or law.

When we move into the New Testament we see Conversion in a clearer air and a truer perspective. We discover features that we had missed in the Old Testament. There is no contradiction, but there is enlargement and fulfilment. Shadow and type, suggestion and dream, are not abandoned ; they are realized in a divine Evangel which abides after twenty centuries, the sufficient motive for the fact of Conversion. The Law and the Prophets are not denied, they are realized in a Gospel, which is more than a mandate ; it is a redemption. The relations between Conversion and the New Birth become more intimate and impressive. Precept becomes power, and decision is the seal of regeneration. We owe much to scholars and philosophers who have sought to make clear the rationale of Conversion. Their enquiries have given to Evangelism a new credibility, and saved us from much passionate dogmatism. We read their researches with gratitude. We would not complain when their findings startle us, but our supreme text-book on Conversion is the New Testament. It has

never been rivalled, and imagination cannot dream that it will ever be superseded. We do not discuss any theories of inspiration, and we are not concerned to interpret its authority. For us it is sovereign and final, because it gives to man, in the most tremendous crisis of life, strength for decision and warrant for the great choice which creates both character and destiny. We find Reform in the Old Testament ; we feel the truth of Revival in the New. At Sinai duty is enforced ; at Calvary sacrifice becomes the truest freedom.

We feel a new personal touch. Vague ideals and holy generalities are focussed in a divine and winsome personality. Law, as a challenge and summons, is merged in a Love, which is clothed with flesh and blood, and dwells among us. Penalty and promise are not final motives ; they flower into loyalty to a living, personal Lord. "The Word is made Flesh," and we are brought into literal contact with Jesus. John the Baptist, who is a link between the Old and New, gives us the key-note in his summons : ¹"Behold the Lamb of God !" In word, deed and touch, the message becomes a Person to be known, obeyed and loved. This change is tremendous, and must be appreciated if we are to see the full force of the Evangelical conception of Conversion. It is no longer a change of moral conduct. It is more that a new relationship to law. It is the surrender of love and loyalty to a personal Lord. Ideals and principles are precious ; they can do much for us in the way of

¹ John i. 29.

inspiration and guidance, but in the hour of destiny we need the quickening presence and touch of a personal Lord. It is said that Christ is Christianity. Personal supremacy is essential here, as in no other religion the world has known. In Conversion, it is just as true that Christ is the central personal factor. Without Him we could not know Conversion, as it is declared in the redeemed experience of sane and saintly men and women. This note must never be lacking in any Evangelism which would know victories of regeneration. The call of creed and the ambition of sects are utter impertinence compared with the personal invitation: "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Our Lord enforces this feature in His ministry among men. He is the centre of His own appeal: "Come unto Me," "Follow Me," "Learn of Me," "Believe in Me," "Be in Me and I in you," are the august commandments with which He arrests the thought of the world. He is the message as well as the messenger. He is the Truth even more than its Teacher. He is Lord, while He is revelation. In this calm assertion of personal centrality Jesus stands alone. With a calm authority which filled His contemporaries with amazement, He claims to be the decisive factor in each man's Conversion. We shall see further on that this claim is granted by the Christians of every century and clime. It is sufficient here to see how such a demand by the Son of the carpenter would create an astonishment which would move the children of tradition to rage and hate.

The character and life of men are judged by their relation to Him. Love of Him is the master-motive, the creative power. Nothing else counts in comparison with this central loyalty. The disciples learned that they must be ready to surrender trade, property, old fidelities, kinships among the living and the dead, when Jesus calls.

Life and death are but incidents in relation to His bidding. To lay down life at His call is to possess immortality; to refuse death, when He calls for sacrifice, is to lose life in the most real sense. All paradox and even contradiction are to be welcomed rather than deny His word. His authority is final as well as personal. Heaven and earth may vanish, but His message endures for ever. It was the most daring challenge mankind had ever heard. When it was accepted and obeyed, it made inevitable conversions so wonderful that bigots and formalists were driven to erect a Cross to hide the shame of their dismay. The centrality of Christ remains the heart of Conversion.

This personal touch is illustrated by our Lord's approach to the individual. The disciples are called by name, Peter and Andrew, James and John. To the woman of Samaria, to Nicodemus the enquirer, and to the eager Zaccheus He declares Himself, and the deepest truths of His mission. The vital question is always implied, "Who do ye say that I am?" He was ready, at any moment, to let the crowd wait while He made plain to the seeking soul the way of Salvation. The solitary

individual was more to Him than the mass movement. The greatest voice of history will discourse the divine Evangel to the lonely enquirer in the cottage or by the wayside. It is fatally easy to be enslaved by statistics. We delight to count our converts by the thousand, and we are rebuked by reactions, which are inevitable, unless the individual is brought into personal relation with a personal Lord. The psychology of the soul is more important than the psychology of the crowd. Both are related in the most intimate reactions, but we fail if in pride we ignore the individual and lust for the excitement of popularity. Conversational Evangelism is the pattern our Lord has set for us. Conversion is never a question of unconscious influence. We are not driven like leaves before the wind. Here, if nowhere else, the soul is solitary and sovereign. It makes its own choice ; not of a creed or a system, but of a personal Saviour. It registers its individual decision to accept a new loyalty. It turns aside from the old paths and sets upon its new way of obedience and love. There can be no substitution here. The personal will yield to the personal Christ, and at once goes on to find that Christianity is experimentally possessed. The death of Christ has left this personal method unweakened. Paul traces his Conversion to his interview with Jesus Himself. ¹“And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ? it

¹ Acts xxvi. 14, 15.

is hard for thee to kick against the goad. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

The voice was for his ear alone ; the result was a Conversion that has shaped the religious history of our race. The first cry of the awakened soul is, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the answer is ever a revelation which changes the life by the reproach and imperative of Love. In the New Testament, Conversion is more the welcome to a Saviour than the acceptance of a message.

Conversion is a revolution, a change so complete that no language of contrasts is vivid enough to embody this truth. The gentle refrain of the Sermon on the Mount was a challenge and contradiction to the age in which Jesus spoke. Bishop Quayle tells us that the word "Blessed," as applied to gentle souls, smote that generation as an explosive. It tore a great term from its traditional superhuman context and applies it to simple peasant folk. It shattered the common standards of statecraft and religion, genius, wealth and war, and offered the age an incredible substitute. To-day we have not yet dared to apply all the explosive implication of the great sermon which we read as a musical reverie and often forget it is a mighty challenge. It is a true instinct, that drives tyranny and tradition to see in the Gospel always a threat and a revolution. The change produced in personal life exhausts every vocabulary. We are carried from bondage into freedom, out of the lusts of the flesh into the life of the spirit. We

are lifted out of darkness into light, from death into life. The captives of the devil become the children of God. Even the body, which is the natural seat of appetites and passions, becomes beautiful and sacred as a Temple of the Holy Spirit. We begin with a change of direction, and we go on to possess a life which is ¹“hid with Christ in God.” We do not crowd our pages with proof-texts, but every student of the New Testament knows that language is insufficient to declare the vital revolution of Conversion.

With amazing boldness the fact is related to all the cosmic energies. It is the moral crisis to which the Universe travels. Nature groans in travail to this issue. All the mystic energies find their flower in this fact. Literally, the converted man becomes “a new creation in Christ Jesus.” The new order is born, and in that transcendent fact Nature as well as Grace finds contentment. Scholars, whom we welcome, labour to show us that Conversion is in accord with the hidden laws which shape personality. It is the true flowering of the subconscious self. The New Testament is more daring, and assumes that Conversion is in harmony with the hidden energies which shape worlds and rule the Universe. The fact and appeal of the Cross were set from the foundation of the world, and Conversion is man’s reply to the Omnipotent Love which is the central power of Heaven and earth. The Gospels and Epistles put no limits to the amazing wealth and significance

¹ Col. iii. 3.

of this moral fact. We must avoid the real peril of scientific explanation being allowed to impoverish a spiritual treasure.

Conversion in the New Testament is the door to Life ; redeemed, full, supernatural and everlasting. The study of this Life would lead us into the fascinating realm of mysticism, which is beyond our province, but which cannot be ignored by any who would understand the Christian life. It is the consciousness of that august fact which Emerson states in glowing words. ¹“ Within man is the Soul of the Holy ; the wise silence, the universal Beauty, the Eternal One.”

In Conversion the fountains of the great deep are broken up, and this life comes to self-consciousness. It creates its own world of experience—mystic and illimitable. It moves into divine and unseen relationships which kindle a love which is more than flesh can bear. It enters ineffable sorrows and unspeakable bliss, and finds their reconciliation in a fulness of life. The earth and sky, duty and kinship, life and death, are clothed in new colours, not painted from without, but glowing from within, radiant with all the energies of life. It is no mere code of morals, or system of kinship or plan of salvation. It is the birth and leap into life. Intellect no longer halts in a process. The thinker becomes a seer. ²“ He discerns truth as a living thing without anything that can properly be called ratiocination.”

¹ “ Mysticism,” by Mrs. Herman, p. 19.

² “ Religio Poetæ,” by Coventry Patmore, p. 291.

This is the vital change we feel as we pass from the Old Testament to the New. The programme that made Israel great becomes the vital pulsation which changes the sinner into the saint.

The supreme claim that Christ made was that He came to give Life. It was vastly more than a change in habit ; it was the birth of a life. It is the amazing vitality of Jesus which surprises the student and explains the victory which He wins in all the generations. It is this fact which impressed His compeers with an astonishment beyond definition. It was not His teachings, or miracles, or example, which moved the disciples to worship. These things demand admiration rather than adoration. It was His life which conquered them, a life which conquered death, and is to-day to ten thousand times ten thousand men and women the most real fact in the Universe. Paul declares this truth, when he says, ¹“Jesus, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead.”

Here is involved no contrast or conflict with the fact of sacrifice final in the Crucifixion. It is the mystic force of a divine life which enables Calvary to conquer the world. When Christ declares that His mission is to impart this life to plain men and women, and that in its power they shall overcome sin, succeed in all their prayers, and do “even greater works” than He did, motives are kindled

¹ Romans i. 3, 4.

which make Conversion inevitable in the soul that has ears to hear.

It is this fulness of life which invests Jesus with absolute certainty and serene conviction. "He prevailed in the Great Temptation;" spoke with an authority which arrested the haughty and sceptical; declared paradoxes and solved problems in a quiet strength that challenged the standards of His age. He was unmoved by flattery, unruffled by fear, and unfettered by popular social judgments. These things were never a pose with Him; they were life, full and self-determined.

His miracles of healing and restoration were not prodigies to create wonder; they were evidences of a life that must overflow in deeds vital and victorious. Death fled before Him at the house of Jairus, the widow of Nain rejoiced in His prowess, and even corruption could not protect death from His triumphant call. The resurrection was the sure consummation of a life that could not be denied. In all the story of the Church there has been found the conviction that Jesus lives, and the final word of preaching declares that this life becomes the possession of those who turn to Him. No mechanical theories of substitution; no forensic or moral account of the atonement; no ecclesiastical or sacramentarian institution must ever dim our vision of Christ the life-giver.

It was His consciousness of this divine life which explains much in His ministry that otherwise would seem incredible. He never owned to a sense of sin, no prayer for pardon ever fell from His lips, and

He was ever conscious of unbroken union with God the Father, except for a brief moment on the Cross, when the blackness of a world's sin obscured the glory of His Father's face. Into that one awful moment we refuse to peer, for it is the final tragedy of evil and the agony of love. Hell did its worst, and in its instant of boasting was smitten by the Life that was in Him. In these features He stands contrasted with the greatest saints. As they are pure so are they conscious of an unworthiness that drives them to confession. Constant union with God is the goal they seek by contemplation, prayer and service, and only in moments of rapt ecstasy are they content. Temptation is very real and terrible to them, and they only win their battle in an agony which leaves many a wound and scar. Christ is more than they, a Son rather than a saint, the Beloved more than the worshipper, The Lord and not the devotee. All this is He by reason of Life.

His summons to men is that they should come into vital union with Himself and share His life. The union is so intimate that the metaphor of the branches and the vine, or the figure of marriage, only suggest an identity closer than can be put in speech. It is here that Conversion and the New Birth become one. It is the final Evangel of the New Testament, a fact steadfast in the will of God, proven in the greatest achievements of sainthood, and immovable in the experience of Conversion. The fact is not affected by duration of time; it may be either a revolution, swift as flame, or an evolution,

gentle as the growth of harvest. It is not dependent on temperament or type. It may be a Jew, a Roman or a Greek ; a barbarian, Philippian or slave may hear the call. The publican or harlot or moralist is open to the summons. It ignores all distinctions and passes all barriers. It reaches to the silent depths of personality where men unconsciously are one. Each man hears the call in his own tongue. If he obeys with the will, he has entered the fact of Conversion, and the portals of everlasting life are open to him ; and he shall pass on to experiences and conquests which are only real to spiritual apprehension. He begins to realize the actuality of the greatest of all confessions.¹ "I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." He touches, says Mrs. Herman,² "that hidden ground, which is both very God and truly Himself." He is now in Christ, and the doctrine of the divine immanence becomes a conscious self-identification with God. It is the surrender of self to the long, sweet wooing of Christ. It is not the denial of personality, but it is the possession of a new heart, and out of the heart are the issues of life. It is the most tremendous fact in history, and is the goal of Scripture Revelation.

¹ Galatians ii. 20.

² "Meaning and Value of Mysticism," p. 320.

CHAPTER III.

The Great Summons.

THE call to Conversion is the unchanging summons of the Christian pulpit. It will dominate all its views of life, duty, society, and the hereafter. It is the focus of the preacher's vision as it is the motive of his appeal. He is not so much a teacher or expositor, though the functions of both are involved. He is the Herald of Good News; he bears "the tidings of salvation" and challenges the will, while he arrests the conscience. He will put first things first; he seeks not popular admiration or intellectual assent or sectarian reinforcement; he aims at personal surrender to his Lord. He is called to turn men from sin to righteousness, and from the lusts of flesh and pride to devotion to the ideals of life as revealed in Christ his Lord. All personal charm, mental endowment, oratorical and magnetic gifts will be invoked for this central purpose. To win decision for God he is trained, and, if he fails here, he fails everywhere. Without this achievement, he may win the hearing of mighty crowds, or be a master of ecclesiastical finance, or prove himself an expert in the manage-

ment of men, but, if he cannot arrest evil men and rejoice in their transformation into the Christian type, he is either a pretender, or of all men most wretched. If he prevails here, his reward is beyond price. His audiences may be small, and he may not win public attention, but if he makes conscience vocal, and stirs the stagnant soul with desires for God, he has proved his calling, and his joy shall have no end.

It is not required that his success shall be startling, or that he shall create some amazing mass movement. He may be most effective in wayside conversation with solitary enquirers, or his touch may silently convince youth and maiden that the moment has come for spiritual decision. He may have no statistics to prove his claim; indeed, he will make no claim at all, but it is enough for him to lead his hearers into his Master's presence. We dare not dictate as to his methods. The Spirit is as free as the wind, and the man who is possessed of the Spirit shall move in liberties, that are unexpected and unharnessed, but the fact of Conversion must be his credential as well as his goal. We need to escape the heresy that conversion is the privilege or task of a class which relies upon eccentricities of approach, mesmeric methods or nomadic novelties. The Methodist preacher dare not barter away his supreme birthright. He is called to the ministry of Conversion, and apart from that fact his ordination has little meaning or value. No other activities, studious or social, can fill the vacancy if this is missing. Methodism was born in the glow of

Conversion, and it only deserves to live so long as the melting fires continue to burn.

No work involves so much exhaustion as this wrestling with men to win their decision for Christ. It puts upon a man the stigmata of his Lord and brands him with the passion of the Cross. It provokes conflict with "the beasts at Ephesus," and moves to rage principalities and powers of wickedness in high places. Whatever may be our reckoning of a personal devil, there are malign forces, hierarchies of evil, beyond our definition, which besiege and storm any man who makes Conversion the central ambition of his life. No preacher succeeds here, but he must pay the price of sweat of soul. He will be attacked by subtle and alluring temptations. The animal within will leap upon him when nerve and brain are exhausted by his supreme appeal. There will be dark moods of reaction when doubt will challenge his faith and fear will betray his confidence. Moral inertia, angered pride, and the hosts who live on sin will lust for his downfall. If we knew all the facts of some moral lapses that have shocked us, we should pity rather than condemn. Conversion is the fact on which the pulpit stands, but it is the most costly fact in the life of men. Its appeal is potent in a sacrifice that is divine and eternal. It still requires sacrifice on the part of those who would be its heralds and prophets to men. There are dark hours for the soul of the preacher. He may take some comfort from the words of J. R. Illingworth :¹

¹ *Lux Mundi*, p. 89.

"The men of sorrows are the men of influence in every walk of life. Martyrdom is the certain road to success in any cause. Even more than knowledge pain is power. And all this because it develops the latent capacities of our being as no other influence can."

It is true for preachers that it is the Cross-bearers who save the world. Someone has said, "God's caresses have wounds," but the preacher knows how precious is their healing grace.

When we would understand the central message of the pulpit, we find we are still in the New Testament. In the Acts and the Epistles we have the wondrous story of men who turned the world upside down, shattered its most cruel imperialism, laid low its pretentious philosophy, and made the foul orgies of its corrupted worship loathsome to the mighty peoples who should shape the destiny of the world. As reformers and history-makers they have had no rivals, but their influence upon public affairs was indirect. In this they differ from the prophets of the Old Testament. The Heavenly Jerusalem was more to them than the capital of their race or the city of the Cæsars. To the modern mind their vision often seems narrow, but it was intense and truly focussed. They were men of one idea, they preached for one end: Conversion, with all its personal and religious implications. They refused to be drawn aside into fascinating controversies in which some of them could have won fame and applause. They did not despise learning, or their writings would not retain the homage of

scholars to this day; but all were absorbed in a flaming experience which had come to them and which they burned to kindle in other men. They were not monastic in taste or habit, they mingled with the crowd and loved the rush of the city street, but they ever saw the people as sinners under sentence of death, in bondage to the devil, and felt sure they had the one message that could give liberty. They had come to see the ineffable truth of atonement, and to them it was precious as the fact of redemption. To the Apostles, Conversion was a matter of life and death. We must preserve the same imperative urgency.

The appeal is addressed to normal men and women. Congregations were not selected according to their temperamental suitability to the Evangel. They came through all the processes and experiences of natural life to the place and hour of decision. It might be the proud of Athens, the quarrelsome of Corinth, the enthusiasts of Antioch, the rulers and slaves of Rome, or the bigots of Jerusalem,—to all was the message given, and among all classes were Conversions seen. Real human men were stirred in the depths and lifted to the heights. It would not be necessary to assert this commonplace were it not that there are those who make so much of type and temperament that in their classification they affirm responsiveness to conversion to be possible in only certain conditions of personality and experience. We are told that some are naturally religious. They are eager, open-eyed souls; they are simple, childlike and trustful, or they are

superstitious and servile, the victims of fear. It is to these the preacher may appeal with confidence. They will obey his call not so much because of the content of his Gospel as because of what they are in themselves. There are other men, cautious, cynical or dull, proud, self-sufficient or pugnacious, to whom Conversion has no open way. These hardened types sit behind their gates of brass, and involve for the boldest preacher defeat and despair.

Sometimes men are classified according to their social condition, and we are told loftily that the appeal for Conversion must regard gradations of rank and wealth; the cry, "Repent, and be ye converted," is properly addressed to the masses. It is the vogue of Evangelists within or upon the fringes of the Salvation Army, but it savours of impertinence when addressed to the cultured, affluent, and influential classes. Conversion is for the drunkard, thief, and outcast; he must be scorched with fires if he is to feel at all; but to preach Conversion, a revolution of choice to decent, sober, clean-speaking, well-dressed congregations is an extravagance which is vulgar and offensive. I have been warned in more than one city that the direct evangelistic appeal was not adapted to certain congregations. Such distinctions are puerile and foolish.

These differences are real, we shall study them later, but unless they dehumanize men and women they do not remove them beyond the orbit and necessity of Conversion. The Gospel goes far beneath all these variations of temperament and

condition to the solemn depths of personality, where we are one in an identity which cannot be denied until humanity itself is destroyed. The Apostles knew nothing of these distinctions, at least they refused to be affected by them, they mumbled no democratic shibboleth, but they knew that "God is no respecter of persons." They did not pose as social champions, but they held Onesimus the slave to be precious, while his master Philemon was a brother beloved. They believed, so must we, that as long as man is man, he needs Salvation and God. When he is made to feel that need and choose its fulfilment, he has entered the wondrous fact of conversion.

The Apostle-preachers always made Christ the centre of the Gospel of Conversion. Paul is vivid and complete when he tells us,¹ "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord," and goes on to say that the revelation which has made him a preacher, is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The centrality of Christ is always the chief feature of the message of Conversion. The moment we depart from this law, which is more than a tradition, we lose our power to arrest men. It is to secure this magnetic influence that meditation is as necessary as study, and prayer is more important than books. It is when the preacher comes down from the Mount, with the light of communion upon his face, that his message becomes a revelation which cannot be escaped. It is hunger for this

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 5, 6.

power, which is vastly more than intellectual or rhetorical, which is driving many young prophets to a study of Mysticism. It may have its dangers, but the Life of Contemplation is to be preferred to fussy and fretful activities. We must keep the Lord's face before us, if we are to see men converted as we declare His will of love. Our supreme business is to tell the story of Christ, and how can we do it unless our heart is entranced with Him? The doctrine we believe, but it is the Lord we love, and it is love alone that will melt the most stubborn antipathy to our Evangel. The old deep saying is still true: "Better the fountain in the heart than the fountain by the way." This is the living water that made the Woman of Samaria magnetic in her call to her kinsmen, and it is this possession of Christ within that will make us witnesses who never falter in our testimony of salvation.

These preachers declared Christ as Lord. It was His supremacy rather than any personal authority which gave them the right to approach men with the demand for conversion. Their calling and ordination were from above, and they feared no charge of intrusion so long as they spoke in His name. Long before the Church settled the methods of ministerial selection great preachers travelled over land and sea to win converts for their great Evangel. They were men who differed deeply and widely, but they did agree that they were called of Christ to preach the Gospel of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. They were not all narrow men, their interests were wide, they travelled much,

and were learned in the problems and issues of life, but they were intense in the centrality of their allegiance; they knew no Lord but Jesus, and sought no calling but His. He was their theme, and apart from Him they had no appeal with which to move men to the tremendous act of Conversion. Preachers are paralysed when they lose this central nerve of consciousness. Nothing can avail us in our summons to men if we cannot trace our calling back to the bidding of our Lord. Without this we are impertinent babblers on solemnities, which lie deep in the hearts of men. In blunt speech only converted men have the right to demand Conversion; the unity of the preachers is the same as that which makes the books of the New Testament one, and of them Dr. Denney says:¹ "In spite of the various modes of thought and feeling which the canonical Christian writings exhibit, there is really such a thing as a self-consistent New Testament. . . . There is a unity in all these early Christian books, which is powerful enough to absorb and subdue their differences, and that unity is to be found in a common religious relation to Christ." That "common religious relation to Christ" is the real unity and authority of Christian preachers in every age. We are blind when we substitute for it a "religious relation," to church or doctrine or sacrament.

The preachers sought to bring their hearers into direct personal touch with Jesus. They are His

¹ Jesus and the Gospel, p. 100.

witnesses and ambassadors, and are called to carry on His ministry upon earth, which was interrupted, but not broken, by His death and ascension. The Ethiopian eunuch is converted when Philip had¹ "preached unto him Jesus." Paul recovers from his explosive interview with Christ, and² "straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus." After the miracle of Pentecost Peter carries the Great News, and lo! it is the story of³ "Jesus of Nazareth." "This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses." The personal touch, which we have seen was distinctive in the ministry of Jesus, must be maintained by those who preach in His name, though now it must be by human mediation. The human voice is needed for those in whom faith has not learned to recognize the abiding spiritual presence of the Ascended Lord.

The Gospel story of Jesus is a converting power. His example so radiant, His teaching so lofty, and His judgments so true, are designed to move men away from sin and inspire them to choose the higher way. We are wrong when we say there is no saving value in His "mere example." True it is not all the Evangel, but it is still a power for righteousness. Dr. G. B. Stevens puts this clearly when he says:⁴ "Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. He bade men learn of Him that they might find rest unto their souls. In His Mountain Sermon He depicted the nature and requirements

¹ Acts viii. 35. ² Acts ix. 20. ³ Acts ii. 22-32.

⁴ "The Christian Doctrine of Salvation," pp. 40, 41.

of true righteousness. . . . Jesus evidently contemplated His teaching and example as saving in their effect upon men. He sought by these means to quicken in men desires and efforts for a better life the life of sonship to God, which is salvation. He presented a conception of God which was attractive and adapted to move the heart to penitence for sin, and to gratitude and obedience. He illustrated the godlike life among men in His benevolent works, in His sympathy with suffering, and in the encouragement which He gave to every good aspiration and endeavour. . . . The life of Jesus, with its various expressions of itself in word and act, was a powerful saving agency in His time and still remains such."

It was comparatively late in His public ministry when He began to call attention to the coming fact of the Cross. The preacher must not treat the earthly life of Jesus as a mere prelude or preparation to the drama of redemption. It is so wondrous in its fascination, and so uplifting in its charm, that to all who are not hardened in lust and pride it is still the call to Conversion. He is still the "fairest among ten thousand," and in sheer beauty of purity is "Mighty to Save."

At the same time it is evident that the Apostle-preachers found their most potent appeal in the death of Christ. The Cross was the centre of their Evangelism. We need not discuss the dogmatic ideas which seek to interpret the Cross : atonement, penalty, substitution, satisfaction and reconciliation. Theology must drape the fact as it will. The truth

remains that in the Cross is a deed which men must behold if the Evangel is to smite, arrest and save. The greatest of the apostles says:¹ "We preach Christ crucified." "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Sir W. Ramsay is bold enough to affirm,² that Paul turned from Athens to Corinth a disappointed man, for in the former city he had tried to win his audience by philosophic argument, and had failed. He never repeated the experiment. He centred his faith and message in the preaching of "Christ crucified." It would never fail as a converting power, for it is³ "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

The Cross remains the central theme and force of any pulpit that would win triumphs of Conversion. It is not to be discussed but declared. The preacher may travel far and wide for illustration and exposition, but he begins at the Cross and ends there. He will not forget the charm and spell of the life of Jesus, but he knows that after a lapse of two thousand years such a life would be a vague ideal, a sacred memory rather than a conquering power, were it not that it is re-born for every age in the constant miracle of the Cross. The preacher sees in it the supreme deed of the Godhead. It is not a symbol, it is a transaction, and in it God vindicates at all costs the sovereignty of righteousness. We can tolerate no thought of strife in the Deity, justice set against mercy and judgment against

¹ 1 Corinthians i. 23, ii. 2.

² "St. Paul the Traveller," p. 252. ³ 1 Corinthians i. 24.

grace. It is no bargain, however sacred, by which an angry God is placated. It is infinite Holiness, giving its greatest gift that righteousness may be declared, and goodness made possible to men.

There can be no appeal more potent than this to melt the most flinty heart. To portray timidly and reverently a suffering God is more effective than all the thunders of passionate denunciation. The theme is too great for glib utterance. It is not easy to place this final fact within the easy vocabulary of the fluent pulpit. It overwhelms us with wonder and dims logic with the tears of love; but the preacher in some way, by a sigh, a gesture or a broken word, must make the divine tragedy real to men, if he would break through the proud crust of persistent sin and haughty-unbelief. It is not so much the God of many attributes which theology would classify. It is the God of suffering who can break the fountains of human feeling into cleansing streams. This vision will save religion from all formality, and discipleship from routine. It will make Conversion sublimely unselfish, and therefore Christian. It will kindle decision into love, till we shall hear men cry: "Must Jesus bear the Cross alone? Let me suffer with Him or not live." The cry of mysticism is supreme evidence of the New Birth.

The preacher sees in the Cross a tremendous Judgment. It is an eternal and terrific condemnation of sin. Mrs. Herman puts this plainly.¹ "To come within the scope of that redeeming

¹ "Meaning and Value of Mysticism," p. 325.

Love, the blind evil of the cosmos must come to consciousness in man as sin. In other words, the Christian mystic, while refusing to view good and evil as equally absolute and independent forces pitted against each other, sees the reality and exceeding sinfulness of sin in its very dependence upon a righteous God, who denies and condemns it, and, still more, in the death of a Divine Redeemer."

Nothing can so stir the human conscience as the vision of God as

" The Lamb of God that takes
Each living hour a world's red guilt away."

Dr. Forsyth views the Cross from another angle, but he is insistent that the basis of the Cross is not compassion, but holiness set in judgment. We may avoid the gross materialism with which the Passion has been draped far too often, but we cannot escape the conclusion that¹ " He bare our sins in His own body on the tree."

" Gazing thus our sin we see,
Learn Thy love while gazing thus :
Sin which laid the cross on Thee,
Love which bore the cross for us."

It is this call of judgment which can wake those who are dead in trespasses and sin, and create a horror of the evil that has drugged the soul into brutish enslavement. It may not be fashionable to affirm that we preach to sinners. Unconsciousness of moral need is not a comfort, it is death.

¹ 1 Peter ii. 24.

No appeal has been imagined which can so surely stir the conscience as the preaching of the Cross where a Divine Passion forever condemns sin. Sin is now more than the violation of a code or the denial of a duty. It crucifies the Lord afresh and puts Him to open shame.

For preacher and people, the Cross is the supreme declaration of Divine Love. It is the Love of God which endures the Cross in the joyous vision of a redeemed world. The world is to be regenerated in the urge of its appeal, the righteousness of its judgment, and the supremacy of its sacrifice. In a sense too deep for words that love becomes mine ; so intimate that the Cross is mine, till I enter the meaning of the Apostle's word,¹ " I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live : yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Surely no preacher can desire a more powerful appeal than this wondrous and eternal love. If this does not spell conversion, nothing else will. It is essential that he should be one with the love he proclaims. The slightest trace of the perfunctory and professional is fatal to our Evangel. Let the marks of the Cross and the glow of its passion be upon the preacher, and he will be potent in his challenge to sin and persuasion of men. Love is still the supreme power in life. It is so in Nature, the home, and religion. Once make men, whose conscience has been stirred, conscious that God loves them, and they will respond, unless it be possible that a man can lose his soul beyond

¹ Galatians ii. 20.

recovery, while he still bears the semblance of a normal human life. From that metaphysical speculation we shrink. Apart from that, we preach an all-conquering Gospel, and may expect to hear men cry out :

“ Nay : but I yield, I yield !
I can hold out no more,
I sink, by dying love compelled,
And own Thee Conqueror.”

The victory of the preacher is challenged by two schools. They pay their homage to the Evangel, but they treat Conversion as incidental and subordinate rather than as focal and supreme.

The sacramentarian says little about Conversion, but he places his emphasis on Regeneration and finds it in the sacraments, rather than in the will and surrender of the human soul. We have tried to show that Conversion and Regeneration combine into one experience, but they are two acts : human and divine ; two facts, subjective and objective. Vitally they become one, and to deny or ignore the one is to betray the other. Bishop Gore is quite plain.¹ “ Baptism, through which is conveyed the Spirit’s gift of regeneration or incorporation into Christ, is an outward ceremony. . . . It is a ceremony of admission into a visible society. Confirmation, by which is bestowed the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, is an act of benediction, the laying on of the hands of the chief ruler of a society upon one of its members.” Lest we should be in danger of exalting the will of faith he tells us that

¹ “ The Mission of the Christ,” pp. 9, 22.

his belief "puts us in opposition to current undenominationalism. . . . By this name I refer to the theory which represents men as first becoming Christians by an act of individual faith, and, after that, combining into Christian societies, greater or smaller, as suits their predilections." Between that conception and the evangelical preacher there is a deep gulf fixed. No desire for ecclesiastical courtesy or hospitality should tempt us to weaken our conception of the grandeur of Conversion as man's willing response to the love and call of God. The sacraments are precious as a means of grace, and as the nourishment of spiritual life. They are not the life any more than food is life or fuel is flame. We see neither metaphysical nor moral unity possible between baptismal regeneration and the doctrine of Conversion as declared in the New Testament.

The new theologian challenges the preacher from another side. Dr. Warschauer, in an article in the "Christian Commonwealth," in 1907, said: "I certainly do not think it reasonable to expect a man to become a saint of God by quick-change methods. Instead of appealing for Conversion, we must be content to take the slower, more toilsome road of working upon and influencing men's characters—steadily, quietly, persistently, and not grow weary in well-doing. Evolution, not revolution, is the normal method in the life of the spirit, as in the life of physical nature."

Such a view would chill and silence the Evangelical pulpit. We shall see in other chapters that it is in

flat contradiction to the verities of experience and the discoveries of psychology. It forgets the explosive forces which are latent in the human soul, and it ignores the fact that the Gospel of "Christ crucified" is itself the greatest "dynamos" or "dynamite" that history has ever known. It would brand with falsehood the testimony of the saints, and would rob us of our faith in spiritual miracles which make our sanctuaries victorious for God. It would doom the pulpit to sterility, and make us complacent witnesses of the robbery of Israel. As a fashion or an ordered system the New Theology has been forced to make terms with the more cultured Evangelicalism which has inspired the Churches, but it has left behind it misgivings that are pathetic in their effect upon the preacher.

We must hark back to Conversion as our calling. We believe that men can be brought into touch with Jesus: they can respond to His word; accept His work as the ground of their confidence and that moment pass out into a new, blessed and divine life. They can will to be "born from above," and lo! the gift is theirs! Their sins can be forgiven and vanquished; their fears can be denied and scattered. They can become new creations in Christ Jesus. We have seen it done. We shall see it again, and in the strength of that conviction the preacher need not falter or mumble as he proclaims a "full, free, and present salvation." We need not be theologians of profundity to see conversions; for we are not alone in our message: the Lord is

with His witness. The Spirit supports the Word ; and we are bold as we declare it is within the power of all men to turn towards God in repentance and trust under the appeal and influence of the truth. That turn of life is Conversion, and till he sees it as a fact the true preacher can never be content.

CHAPTER IV.

The Verdict of Experience.

WE need not travel far to find the fact of Conversion verified in experience. In every congregation there are men and women who are as conscious of Conversion as they are of personal existence. They differ in the outward conditions and inward faculties of life, but they agree that at some time or other, in some way or other, they met their Lord, life was changed in the meeting and they were born anew in Christ Jesus. They may or may not be able to name date and place, but they do know that in a wondrous fashion the motive and outlook of life have been changed. This is not only true of men who have been lifted out of gross sin and lustful self-indulgence, but it is just as true of the quiet, moral folk to whom there has come no violence of earthquake but the crimson birth of a new day. These witnesses do not speak with one accent. Each man testifies in his own tongue. Their testimony is cumulative, and in every Christian congregation it creates the very atmosphere in which the Great Evangel can be enforced,

We are being driven back to the old phrase, "experimental religion." Philosophy and psychology are calling for witnesses to confirm their theories. Converts are being classified; their evidence is weighed and their stories are treasured, not in emotional delight so much as in the calm attempt to understand the wondrous phenomenon of Conversion. Our fathers cut across many an argument, as they preached, that "they might give a bit of their experience." They were not seeking an easy refuge from a difficult task, they were relying upon evidence, which our most modern scholars regard as of the greatest value. Experience may err, it may be excessively subjective and imaginative, it may mistake phosphorescence for the "Inner Light," and disordered fancies for the "witness of the Spirit;" but, in face of all risks, the truest, surest evidence of the Christian Religion is Christian Experience. Much has been written as to the "seat of authority in Religion." Some would place it in Bible, Church or Creed. All have claims to our reverence, but surely for each man the vital authority is his soul-consciousness that he has met with God, chosen His will, and received the gift of a new life.

For long years Methodism was suspicious of Mysticism, though in its hymns and the strange sayings of peasant converts it declared a kinship to the mystics that was unconscious, and almost unwilling. The tradition of John Wesley died hard. By temperament, more than by conviction, he never outgrew his natural fear of the subjective

and emotional. He feared excesses, and in that he was wise, as many a passionate Revival has shown, but he was not always quick to appreciate the ineffable, unspeakable experiences that may follow Conversion. It seems a paradox for one whose heart was warmed in the prayer meeting at Aldersgate Street, and in the glow of his new life kindled the mightiest Evangelistic movement the world has seen. Charles Wesley and he sang a hymn that night :

“ Where shall my wondering soul begin ?
 How shall I all to heaven aspire ?
 A slave redeemed from death and sin,
 A brand plucked from eternal fire.
 How shall I equal triumphs raise,
 Or sing my great Redeemer’s praise ? ”

He was taught by Peter Böhler to believe in the witness of the Spirit, never to rest content with less than inner certitude of his conversion. Surely that is mysticism : the “ inner light ” ; what Starbuck calls¹ spiritual illumination, and which he says is “ a distinct type of conversion experience.” It is a strange irony that Wesley should call mysticism² “ most sublime nonsense, inimitable nonsense : fustian not to be paralleled,” and after reading “ *Theologia Germanica*,” he says, “ Glory be to God that I now prefer the plain Apostles and prophets before him and all his mystic followers.” He had a vision deeper than he knew, and Methodism is true to his unconscious genius when it

¹ “ *Psychology of Religion*,” p. 85.

² “ *Works*,” pp. 353, 326.

seeks union between a redeemed experience and the realities of Mysticism. The phrase, "Simple Gospel," becomes a peril when it leads us to ignore the awe and wonder, the tremendous and hidden mysteries which are involved in the fact of Conversion. There God and man meet in an eternal transaction. Heaven and earth can witness no greater event. It is not glibly uttered in speech. It is possessed as a hidden treasure in experience.

Ritschl is right when he distinguishes between theoretical judgments and judgments of value, and allows authority only to the latter in the Christian life. He is bold enough to declare that the pathway to the knowledge of God and Christ is through experience, and our judgments must be based upon their "worth for us."

The intellectual faculties are not denied in experience, but there is a fundamental difference between religious and scientific knowledge. In the one the experiment is inward and subjective; in the other it is outward and objective. The verdict of the one rests on a change to be lived. In the other it is a modification to be observed. The result of the one is vital and spiritual; in the other it is formal and dynamic, or static. It may be doubted whether much is gained by the attempt to state the fact of Conversion in philosophic terms. Even biological analogies may lead us astray. We face facts that can only be spiritually discerned, and the scholar is not humiliated when he confesses his limitations. There is real peril lest the use of an alien tongue in religion should lead us to doubt

the reality of mystic and spiritual phenomena. There is another world in which we live. We are encompassed by "a cloud of witnesses," who are akin to us in an experience too deep for definition and sometimes too awful for words. This is not to plead for the irrational. Our experience is swift and intuitive, but it is not a mere frenzy. It is a flame, but it is also a light. It is a birth, a leap into being, but it has form, function, growth, and beauty. It is a faith, but it need not be fanaticism, even when it refuses the dictation of the school-men. It is a "new heart," a "clean heart," but it should always be truth and sincerity in the inmost parts. Converts are charged with being "drunk with new wine," but they are sober in the nerve and marrow of life and they are wise unto salvation. There need be no conflict between experience and intellectualism, but there can be no such subordination as some would vainly wish.

Philosophy, when truest to its mission, pays homage to experience, and gives it the first place. Mr. McKenzie tells us :¹ "Whatever may be the differences among modern philosophers in other respects, all are practically one in this, that what we have to seek to understand is the content and implications of our conscious experience." When we seek to read the content and implications of the experience of Conversion, we find it is no mirage but a fact ; no vague ideal but a vital reality. Its variations are infinite as showing its wealth. Its phenomena demand the supposition of a super-

¹ "Outlines of Metaphysics," p. 13.

natural and divine energy, but they are proven in character and service. The lowly convert who tells his story in the Class Meeting is not foolish or vain-glorious. As long as he confines himself to the realities of his own experience, he is doing great service to religion, and he is pursuing a method which the proudest philosophy will not despise. The test he must accept is sincerity. The moment he is affected or perfunctory, echoes the pious platitudes of others, or repeats formulæ that have lost their sap, that moment he ceases to be of value as a witness and becomes a trifler, perhaps unconsciously, with the unsullied Truth, which must be the fibre and sinew of the converted life. We need make no apologies for our witness, and whisper it in the obscurity of some hidden class-room. It is the strength of our Evangel, and the greatest preacher will ask for no finer reinforcement.

Experience is sensitive and apt to fear itself. Its breath falls upon a chill air, and cynical scepticism forces simple folk to ask: "May I trust my own experience as valid and authoritative? It is precious, but is it true? Am I fevered or prophetic? Am I a mere sounding-board or a living witness? Am I a psychological case, or am I really a child of God?" These questions are painful and real. They assume many forms, and we may be thankful that experience is not left without corroboration. In these ways the convert may be bold in declaring the witness that is within him. Along these lines of emphasis experience becomes rational and commanding.

The convert is strengthened by an historic background. Here the New Testament is of vital value. It is the confirmation of experience, and is itself vindicated in consciousness. The historicity of the New Testament can never be surrendered. No criticism, however searching and prolonged, has robbed us of the assurance that the New Testament is a record of facts. The story need not be infallible, it is affected by the temperament, limitations, and even prejudices of its writers, but it is history as well as Gospel, and saves the convert from the sad conclusion that his experience is a subjective fancy, or a superstitious legend. In the Old Testament he can see the growth of religious ideas, and a wondrous story it is. It confirms his need, his sense of sin, and his cry for God. He is not abnormal, he is in line with all the generations. His anguish and prayers have their place in the history of men. In the New Testament he finds the objective revelation of a Redeeming Lord ; he sees men, of like passions with himself, convinced of sin ; called to righteousness and obedient in the strength of conscious forgiveness and reconciliation. His Conversion would be true if it had no historical background, but it is triumphantly confirmed in the story of conversions of which the New Testament is full, and the story of the Church has never been empty. It is still the fashion to quote Scripture texts to prove doctrines. It is more important to find spiritual experience confirmed by Biblical incidents which are genuine history. We do not assert too much when we say that the methods

which would deny the historicity of the New Testament would, if applied elsewhere, leave us no ancient history at all. Dr. Denney, in a lengthy argument, shows us "that the significance attached to New Testament facts both by Jesus and the Apostolic writers was redemptive, and the experience produced was redemption." The convert need not fear that he lives in an unreal world of unsubstantial dreams. It is a solid world with a past as well as a present, with a valid memory as much as an inspiring message. Dr. H. Maldwyn Hughes says wisely:¹ "The New Testament, then, gives us knowledge of the facts which lie behind Christian experience. We are assured that, in pinning our faith to Christ, we are resting in no mere poetic fancy or product of the religious consciousness, but in One who lived in time, even as in Eternity, and whose life in the flesh, with all that it revealed of God, is a book which he who desires may read." This unfailing confirmation is one of the surest proofs of the inspiration of Holy Writ.

Experience is confirmed when it is capable of clear statement. It is thus saved from unmeaning rhapsody and irrational excesses which exhaust and often shame the Christian life. Our joy is not chilled when it is grammatical, and our song is not impoverished when it obeys the laws of rhythm. Our Gospel is "Good News," but the "News" must obey the laws of thought and purpose. Canon

¹ "The Theology of Experience," p. 232.

Streeter is right when he says :¹ "The centre of gravity of Christianity does not lie in theology," but he exaggerates when he says, "Christian experience is independent of the verdict of scholars and historians." These men are not our masters, but they serve us well as they show us that a redeemed consciousness is not beyond clear, compact and historic statement. The convert is not the creation of theology. He must never be its slave, but he is vastly fortified, when he finds that his experience is not vague and formless, that it can be declared intelligently in the hearing of others. All thoughtful men have known times when alluring impressions and enchanting intuitions have been tested and proved in the ordeal of statement. It is when we hear it spoken or see it written that we can judge of its real value. Paul had the peril of religious delirium in mind when he sternly rebuked the excesses of the Church at Corinth by his memorable words :² "I thank God, I speak with tongues more than ye all : yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

The convert is not a dervish or fakir abandoning himself to a passion of hysteria. He is not to fill the air with shrill cries and amaze his fellows with grotesque postures, which are nervous more than spiritual. He is possessed of an experience which

¹ "Restatement and Re-union," p. 2.

² 1 Corinthians xiv. 18, 19.

is wisdom. There will be depths unutterable, and heights beyond definition, as there are in all life, but the mightiest certainties of his new life can be stated with the clarity that is full of persuasion. Many of us have been helped in the most awesome moods of life, when we have found expression possible. The ineffable has become real, and the spiritual has taken form before our eyes.

The statement will never become mechanical and uniform, for it is the flower of life. It will advance in beauty and fragrance as the consciousness of conversion enlarges. A living church will never have a dead theology, and a converted soul will never tolerate a professional experience. The abiding test is loyalty to the Spirit of Truth, then we are free to confirm and declare experience in all the infinite varieties of prose or poem. Amiel states this principle eloquently :¹ " A ray of heavenly light traversing human life, the message of Christ has been broken into a thousand rainbow colours and carried in a thousand directions. It is the historical task of Christianity to assume with every succeeding age a fresh metamorphosis, and to be for ever spiritualizing more and more her understanding of the Christ and of salvation."

The task of "every succeeding age" is the loving labour of every converted soul. Experience is confirmed by fellowship. The convert will not only find confirmation in the New Testament and the devotional literature of the saints, but his convictions will be strengthened by his comrade-

¹ " Journal," p. 3.

ship with the redeemed men and women of his own generation. Reading and study are of great value, but the most vital assurance comes through the living speech of the personalities with whom we have actual fellowship. It is in the quick play of question and answer, in the chorus of mutual and personal testimony, that an experience gains clarity and force. Amiel says truly:¹ "It is by teaching that we teach ourselves, by relating that we observe, by affirming that we examine, by showing that we look, by writing that we think, by pumping that we draw water into the well."

All these activities are social, and require audience and comradeship. The two churches which make most of experience, the Quakers, with "the Inner Light," and the Methodists, with "the Witness of the Spirit," insist most earnestly on the necessity of fellowship. Individuality must never be sacrificed, for in the greatest transactions between man and God solitude is imperative, but the necessity of worship can never be outgrown. In worship there must ever be a place for testimony, not that arrogance may find a voice but that experience may receive a living and social confirmation. In praise and prayer, in confession and thanksgiving, worship must never be the performance of preacher or choristers; it is the united expression of Christian experience, and in its totality is a confirmation of the greatest value. Many plans are framed to deepen the desire for worship and to increase our congregations. Schemes that are mechanical and

¹ "Amiel's Journal," p. 45.

clever will fail. Sensationalism will draw a gaping crowd for awhile and then wither. Scolding and rebuke will lower the temperature and weaken the will. It is as we declare the urgency and glory of Conversion and see its actuality, that our Churches will throb with life and glow with fascination. Confirmation will become more than an act of ritual, it will be the reinforcement of experience.

A Liturgy would be helpful if only the worshippers could maintain their spontaneity and personal responsiveness. Phrases and formulæ, oft repeated, grow stale and lifeless, they lose life and thrill, and fail in their great purpose of confirmation. In spite of this limitation the old creeds are precious to us. We may differ from them much, but they do show us how great minds and saintly lives share with us the experiences which are the anguish and the glory of conversion. What Newman says of ideas is just as true of experience :¹ " When one and the same idea is held by persons who are independent of each other, and are variously circumstanced, and have possessed themselves of it by different ways, and when it presents itself to them under very different aspects, without losing its substantial unity and identity, and when it is thus variously presented, yet recommended, to persons similarly circumstanced, and when it is presented to persons variously circumstanced, under aspects, discordant indeed at first sight, but reconcilable after such explanations as their respective states of mind require—then it seems to have a claim to be

¹ " Development of Doctrine," p. 31.

considered the representative of an objective truth." In the same way the experience of Conversion is confirmed as an objective reality.

In these ways Conversion can claim to be a solid fact, a real experience, and a glorious consciousness.

The most powerful confirmation of experience is found in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is wrought and declared in the grace of the Holy Ghost. The doctrine of Christian Assurance is the distinctive witness of Methodism, and it is centred in the personal testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is this which interprets the Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century, and has saved us from an academic deism on the one hand and a proud sacerdotalism on the other. The one sees no need for a miracle of grace; the other, according to Milton, restricts grace to the "lean and scrannel pipe" of a particular line of ordained men. This gift assures the believer of "a divine redemption, a realized pardon, a restored relationship to God through faith, the entrance of supernatural forces into life by grace, the present and perfect attainment of God's ideal in the character." This supreme assurance is verified in the saving energies of the Holy Spirit in the human soul. It is this endowment that makes men witnesses more than apologists. We do not declare a doctrine so much as we proclaim a life. It is this power of the Holy Ghost, which from Pentecost has made human testimony the vehicle of its secret, but first it makes the soul conscious of its gift of life. It

¹ "Wesley and his Century," Fitchett, p. 276.

gives to speech the ring of reality, and makes plain folks prophets who will not be denied.

It is not easy to analyse this deepest confirmation. We see its fruit and watch its joy, but who shall trace its process? It is the most individual of all our gifts, and yet it is the foundation of the Holy Catholic Church. The Reformers were individualists of intense and often narrow conviction, but they revived the Pentecostal authority of the church and called all redeemed souls to share this marvellous ministry of illumination and confirmation. They have been called "Spiritual freelances," but they were the founders of great churches which fill the world with social and sacred testimony. This witness of the Holy Spirit produces results which are amazing and often seem inconsistent. It is not bound by temperamental or theological restraints. "It bloweth where it listeth," and to limit it by mechanical regulations or by ecclesiastical proprieties is blasphemous and fatal. Converted men and women have an unspoken but acute realization of His ministry. He carries on the ministry of our risen Lord ; brings to the heart and mind and conscience the saving truths of Christ's word and work ; assures us of His abiding presence with all that is involved of divine comradeship and captaincy, and by an inward ministry makes available for us all the energies of Divine grace. When His voice speaks peace, no tumult shall make us fear.

The way in which this Divine Voice is recognized is one of the deepest mysteries of life. That

there should be folly and superstition now and again need cause no wonder. The marvel is that there should be such a constant and almost instinctive recognition of this august voice. Explanations are found in subconscious and subjective facts which psychology has begun to tabulate and interpret. We welcome light from any quarter, but we dare not weaken our conviction that there is a spiritual kinship and even unity. Deep calleth unto deep, and the voice of the Divine awakens within us vibrations to which we can give no name, but they are the inviolate confirmation of our experience of conversion. We feel more than we know, and we know more than we can affirm. We are content to know that the ministry of the Spirit is to keep us in unbroken, mystic, redeeming union with our Lord. We can ask no higher gift, for it makes the soul anew, builds the Church, and will regenerate the world. Such an assurance is not a logical conclusion so much as a vital intuition, but it does enable us to see sin forgiven and conquered, humanity saved from wreckage, society lifted into a Holy Family, and the world of shadow and sorrow transformed into the Kingdom of God. This is the Light ineffable and the Truth eternal. It startles us at the moment of Conversion, but it abides through all the days in deepening certainty and enriched assurance.

It is on this certainty of experience that we rest the weight of the tremendous spiritual argument for consecration. In face of this argument our theological and sectarian differences cannot separate us.

Calvinist and Arminian, mystic and logician are one in this experience of Conversion, if nowhere else. Catherine of Siena is valiant through the Spirit when she says :¹ "Therefore bear yourself with manly courage : for unless you do so, you will not prove yourself to be spouses of my truth and faithful children, nor of the company of those who relish the taste of my honour and the salvation of souls."

John Wesley lays aside all his traditions and blazes like a revolutionist as he teaches Scriptural Holiness. It is the Spirit who teaches him that the religious life, beginning with a miracle of grace, can be a victory as surely as it is a struggle. What God demands, man, with the help of God's grace, may give. We may move beyond doubt, fear, and the haunting sense of guilt and failure into the full sunshine of the Divine favour. Wesley was not gay by instinct, but he made holy and filial laughter natural to thousands of his followers by his emphasis on the mighty text, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." He had been a despondent sacerdotalist. In this assurance he leaps into deliverance.

Jonathan Edwards has made vast multitudes tremble before his flaming judgment. His creed and method may offend us, and it would be a cruel folly to try and revive his type of evangelism ; but he becomes lovable, a companion we delight in, when the Spirit shows him the face of God, and he

¹ "The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena," p. 39.

says, in his diary :¹ “ As I was walking there and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, as I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction : majesty and meekness joined together. It was a sweet and gentle and holy majesty ; and also a majestic meekness ; an awful sweetness ; a high and great and holy gentleness. After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered ; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm sweet cast or appearance of divine glory in almost everything. God’s excellency, His wisdom, His purity and love, seemed to appear in everything ; in the sun, moon, and stars ; in the clouds and blue sky ; in the grass, flowers, trees ; in the water and all nature ; which used greatly to fix my mind. . . . Holiness, as I then wrote down some of my contemplations on it, appeared to me to be of a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature ; which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness, and ravishment to the soul. The soul of a true Christian, as I then wrote my meditations, appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year : low and humble on the ground ; opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun’s glory. . . . My heart panted after this—to lie low before God, as in the dust, that I might be nothing, and that God might be

¹ “ Memoir,” by Sereno E. Dwight, p. 61.

all ; that I might become as a little child." We can forgive Jonathan Edwards much, when he lashes the crowd with terror and preaches a cruel but effective creed, as we think of him under the spell of the Spirit, finding a gentle parable in "a little white flower."

With exquisite and loving skill Dr. Alexander Whyte tells us the story of James Fraser, Laird of Brea. In him we see how the Holy Spirit comes to a Presbyterian, a Covenanter, and a doughty fighter, till his "Memoirs of Himself" are a fragrant love story, or as he puts it, "the book of the intricacies of his own heart and life." He was dour, churlish, and sullen. He plunged into bad company, and fell into both open and secret sin. He tried to escape an agony of guilt by all the devices of Scripture reading, prayers, pointed and free, and theological study. It was at a Communion Service that he saw his Lord, and as a Parish Minister his testimony glowed, for years, in spite of persecution and imprisonment, with a tender poetic beauty that seemed impossible to such a stern and stubborn soul.

In all these types there is a spiritual kinship which can respond to the final word of grace. This is the glory which controversy should never dim. Here our divine childhood is manifest, and Conversion will be assured as we listen to the Divine Voice. It is not the special privilege of a cultured few, or the prerogative of lonely genius, or even the reward of unalloyed sainthood. It is our human birthright, and when we turn our faces towards the

Father's House, it is the guide that will never fail us. For us to deny the Witness of the Holy Spirit is to quench the Light of Life.

The immediate need of the Church is to develop the certitudes of experience. Discussion may end in confusion, ritual becomes routine, and organization loses the glow of its early passion; but a living experience of Conversion, kindled and nourished by the Holy Spirit, gives the buoyancy of eternal youth and the joy of unfailing courage. It is more than a credential, it is the secret of conquest. It is more than a statement, it is the basic fact that gives validity to the boldest declarations of Christian doctrine. It is here we realize such intimacy with God that we dare accept the prophet's word:¹ "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels: and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

It is the certainty of Conversion that enables us to claim such a blissful dignity without presumption. Man has been enslaved by evil, and spent his strength in riotous sins. One day he revolts against his bondage, flings from him the shameful yoke, sets out to recover his heritage of purity, his life of sanctity, and the favour of God. He will have stern foes to meet, a grim battle to fight, for it is no easy thing for John Newton the blasphemer, John Bunyan the ruffian, George Müller the thief, and William Clowes the drunkard and dancer, to become a saint. If his steps are set

¹ Malachi iii. 17.

towards God, then he is precious in the Divine sight, such vital treasure, that Christ has died for him. The Holy Spirit keeps company with him, and he shall have his place in the Divine and eternal regalia.

This is a bold faith to hold. It is spiritual audacity to dream this dream. It would be an empty vanity were it not that Conversion is verified in our deepest experience. Our dogmas invite controversy ; our church systems challenge revolt ; but the sure word of a redeemed experience is the Evangel, which mankind will welcome and obey.

CHAPTER V.

The Witness of the Church.

THE Church as a human institution rests upon the fact of Conversion. There is a vast and mystic range of Divine purpose and grace with which we do not deal in these pages. We do not ignore the miraculous origin and supernatural ministry of the Church. It is the most powerful and permanent force in the history of the world. It is the Body of Christ: the Bride of the Eternal God. Its centrality, sanctity, and authority have created the greatest and most gracious literature of all time. It is the gift of God, the continued Incarnation of Christ, and the home of the Holy Ghost. It is the sanctuary for a sin-stained world, and is the herald of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, which shall be the sacred consummation of the ages. We believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and pay it fullest homage when we wage war with the ecclesiastical prejudices, elaborations and arrogance, which too often have dulled its glory. No High Churchman shall surpass us in homage to the Church as a divine institution, resting on miracle and revelation, and authoritative

in spite of all human denial and division. This view of the Church needs revival among us, for the duty of protest and dissent can, with fatal ease, become sour refusal of an authority which rests upon the very will of God. It is this conception of the Church Catholic which will save us from surrender of its supremacy in favour of guilds, societies, brotherhoods, and other institutions which meet a temporary need. They come and they pass away, but the Church remains the Trustee of God's truth and grace.

When we approach the Church on its manward side, we find it built on the fact and experience of Conversion. It declares the evangelical truths of which Conversion is the living expression, and it is constantly reinforced in its faith by the testimony of converted men and women. It will differ widely in its view of the channels of grace, the activities of the redeemed, and their place in the hierarchy of service; but it stands fast in its condemnation of sin, call to repentance, offer of pardon and reconciliation, and in its abiding conviction that men can respond to the call of God in Christ, turn from their sins, and in the power of the life from above may have the witness of the Holy Spirit and the vindication of an eternal righteousness.

Every great converting movement has meant a new epoch for the Church, or, when needed, an explosive force which has compelled the Church herself to prove the fact of Conversion in her corporate life. Without the conscious fact of Conversion the Church becomes an organisation

rather than an organism. It is a club, an assembly, a guild rather than the Church of the first-born. With Conversion as its experience and message, the Church is invested with undying youth. Her enterprise has no bounds, and her authority transcends that of dynasties and statecraft. When men ask glibly, "Have conversions ceased in the Church?" their ease of mind shows that they have not perceived the deepest foundation and central function of the Church. It is still true that the¹ rock on which Christ builds His Church is human personality, fickle and frail, but repentant, ardent, and brave, and capable of all the reality of Conversion.

Often the institutions of the Church are challenged, and Protestantism has been valiant in its protests. Dissent has been necessary for freedom, and we honour our heroic sires who dared to rend a body that the Spirit might have liberty of speech and movement. D. W. Forrest declares their conviction when he says :² "The one real sin against the unity of the Church is the spirit which would exclude from its fellowship any who confess Christ as Head and own the common brotherhood in Him." The one intolerable schism is to deny communion to those who share the fact and testimony of Conversion. It is the perception of this truth which impels the churches towards unity. All separations of name or polity or doctrine become evil if they lead to a denial of a full franchise in the

¹ Matthew xvi. 18.

² "The Christ of History and of Experience," p. 287.

church to converted men and women. If the fact is declared in life, it is doubtful whether any ceremonial can be enforced as essential. It is the experience of the fact which is all important. Unity does not mean a dull uniformity, but we need no longer shut God's household into separate rooms in the interests of individuality. The true Church is no longer a walled garden. It is an expanse as broad and varied as the domains of spiritual life.

It is not exclusive ; it is big and beautiful enough to include all type and temperament so long as the central fact of Conversion is secured. It is a healthy sign that, while denominationalism fades, reverence for the Holy Catholic Church revives among us, and reveals itself in a passionate desire for union which shall make more effective our appeal for Conversion, and secure the ideal of our Lord's great prayer :¹ " That they all may be one : as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." The colossal tasks of Evangelism drive us together in spite of our traditions, fidelities, and prejudices. Bigotry becomes blasphemy in face of man's need of the converting word. It is the urge of the birth from above which makes us impatient of all divisions that place us in hostile or rival camps. When the Church sets forth on great campaigns for Conversion, all questions of ordained persons, consecrated buildings, and ecclesiastical proprieties shrivel in

¹ John xvii, 21.

the fires of a great passion. We have no time for these things when we see our fellows in tragic shame and peril and know we have a mighty salvation to declare. The lifeboat may be driven by muscle, steam, or petrol, if only men are saved from the vortex of despair and death. We ask theologians for academic credentials. All we demand from the Church is the fact and force of Conversion.

This emphasis on Conversion saves the Church from those who would rationalize religion till they take from it the wonder of miracle and the awe of the supernatural. It was the reaction from this deadly chill that gave Methodism its birth and mandate. Rev. G. Tyrrell describes this peril vividly when he says:¹ "Now we know that the eighteenth century witnessed an attempt to rationalize religion, and render it independent of faith and revelation; to substitute so-called natural for supernatural theology, to show that the existence of one God and the immortality of the soul were dictates of human reason, and, as such, formed the substance of universal religion. . . . It took no account of the history of religions, made no study of specifically religious experience. . . . It was just scholastic theodicy with the supernatural omitted. Hence its marble coldness, its inability to make any sort of appeal to religious feeling. It had not sprung from the heart and could not speak to the heart. In England it produced an Evangelical and Catholic reaction; from rational

¹ "Christianity at the Cross Roads," p. 237.

theology and rational ethics men sought warmth and colour and life in sentimentalism, mysticism, or sacramentalism."

The Oxford School sought salvation from rational sterility in the Catholic traditions and elaborate ceremonialism. Methodism found salvation in the revival of Conversion as a message and possession. We have no doubt which chose the better part. So long as our churches offer through God's grace the gift of regeneration to men who obey Christ's call, so long they will never lack enthusiasm or victory.

The testimony of the Church to Conversion has real authority. The man is proud or foolish, who, in the hour of supreme choice, would ignore the counsel and mandate of the Church. It is put in trust of the Gospel. We may doubt whether it is the sole custodian, but surely it is the interpreter of the great Evangel. Its witness is greater than that of the individual; it is cumulative, corporate, and its experience has been gathered through many generations. Self-assertion becomes folly when it would ignore the gathered wisdom of an institution which has made Conversion its study and in it has found the secret of an amazing permanence. It is as if the student should refuse to avail himself of the conclusions of the teachers of other days. His knowledge must be his own, confirmed in his own mind and consciousness, but he would begin insanely if he were to ignore the achievements of school and college. Their learning may be tested by him, but he will welcome it as clearing the way for his fuller

and later enquiries. This is the course we pursue in literature, science, and philosophy, and it is hard to see why it should be regarded as servile superstition in religion. Luther had no reason to regard the Church with extravagant reverence, but he affirms that the Church is the agent by which alone the revelation of the forgiving love of God in Christ is made known to men. He tells us :¹ "Whoever would find Christ must first find the Church. How should one know where Christ and His faith are so long as one does not know where His believers are? He who would know something about Christ must not trust himself, or build bridges into heaven by his own reason, but must go to the Church, visit and make enquiry of it. The Church is not wood and stone, but the mass of people who believe in Christ. To them one must turn and must see how they believe, live, and teach, who certainly have Christ with them. For outside of the Christian Church is no truth, no Christ, and no salvation."

We may not agree in full with this great claim for the Church. We must be fair to remember that Luther regards the Church as a means of salvation because it teaches the Gospel and not because it conveys grace ; but this large reverence for the Church should give pause to those who, in the interests of individual conversion, would deny the evangelical authority of the Church. In the most solitary incident of Conversion we are debtors to the great body of believers, who have kept alive

¹ "Works," vol. x., p. 162.

for us the light of salvation. We only know Christ before Conversion in an historical setting, which is the gift of the Church, or by the inward ministry of the Spirit, which has ever been the franchise of the Church. After Conversion we find ourselves sharing an experience which has been the heritage of the Church, and which it lives to make potent in the life of men. Ritschl has hold of a great truth when he says:¹ "For the individual who is led to faith always finds the domain of human life, which is determined and governed by the forgiveness of sins, already marked out for him; and, moreover, he has to attach himself to the community of believers all the more decisively that he is indebted to that community for the knowledge of salvation and for stimuli of incalculable strength, urging him to appropriate salvation."

It is still the fashion for some Revivalists to lecture and hector the Church. We need not be distressed. The Church is too great to be moved by petulant complaints. These men should remember that in their greatest victories of Conversion, they owe their Evangel, their opportunity, their authority and their congregations to the great Catholic Church. It has failed in much, but it has forced mankind to realize the great fact of change of heart with its birth of a new life. It has made that fact the burden of its message and chorus of its witness. It has saved countless multitudes from self-deception, and made a consciousness, which was mute and subjective, into a testimony

¹ "Justification and Reconciliation," p. 111.

which is the victory of faith. In many tongues, through varied ritual, and by means of all types of personality, it has preserved Conversion from vague uncertainty and retained it as a sure experience. The Church, which has done this for us, deserves the best we can give of reverent and loyal service.

The relation between Conversion and the Church is as close as that between Cause and Effect. Conversion is the birth of life, and the first impulse of life is to seek for itself form and expression. The fact precedes the institution, which exists to declare its glory and force. We claim for Methodism that it is a living organism more than an ecclesiastical organisation. Wesley did not design it, he set this land on flame with the consciousness of conversion, and out of the revival arose the necessity of Church fellowship and life. We do not weaken in our reverence for the Church when we believe that it is the vital product of the fact which it is called to declare to men. The Gospel precedes the preacher, though its good news requires the herald. Divine grace, with its result in change of heart and life, is not dependent upon the Church, but it creates in it a spiritual and social evolution which we have only partially understood. The Church is the inevitable consequent of Conversion, but it must not lord it over that domain, where God and man meet in the august transaction which is decisive of character and destiny. We do not judge here as to the relative value of various methods of Conversion. We allow to psychologists, like Prof.

William James, the largest "Varieties of Religious Experience;" but the central revolution which makes men Christians is fundamental, and must never be treated as an incident of evolution when it is the basis of life. It is not bigotry but sincerity that fails to see how the Church can exist apart from Conversion. Henry Drummond wrote many years ago, in "The Expositor":¹ "Christianity is learning from science to go back to its facts," and Conversion is the most important fact of them all. The Church may outgrow revivalism, but she will die if men and women are not converted under her ministry. It is there, and there alone, that her sanctity and authority are renewed.

We see that Conversion creates the Church when we recognize that it inspires the instinct of spiritual kinship. Like draws to like, and men who share a vital experience will demand association. Because it is spiritual it will be the closest and most enduring of all fellowships. So long as it is a living organism it will avoid the perils which threaten all churches when Conversion is made subordinate to mysticism on the one hand or a precise orthodoxy on the other. We glory in Methodism in that it has avoided both the bondage of clerical despotism and the license of an unregulated lay democracy. We are neither Romanists nor Plymouth Brethren, but there is a danger of moving to the extreme right or the extreme left, the moment we lose the constant impulse of frequent conversions. Life is running, while ecclesiastical machinery enriches the scrap-

¹ Third Series, Vol. I.

heap. The biological equipoise is the wonder of science. And in the living Church there will ever be an exquisite balance of function and authority. That balance will only be preserved as long as both preacher and people are one in the fact of Conversion. It can never be the monopoly of an order, it is the birthright which makes us one in a kinship that is inviolate. Our fellowship stretches far beyond sight and touch. In worship we are akin to the great cloud of witnesses, we are one with the radiant host who sing, "Worthy is the Lamb." They, and we, share life streaming from the tremendous fact in which by redemption we have made our choice. Our garments are washed white, and we sinners of yesterday are made kings and priests unto God. The surest way of meeting the ecclesiastical complexities which trouble us is to set upon our supreme mission of Conversion.

Here we find the great impulse for service. Now we can understand Paul ready to be accursed for Israel's sake, or St. Catherine of Siena praying that she might bear the sins of a heedless world. It is when, as converted men, we gaze upon our Crucified Lord that we enter the conviction that the Church must be crucified with Christ, and she must refuse to come down from the Cross until her travail is accomplished. It is Conversion alone that will save the Church from the lust of authority, and enable her to weep and bleed that men may be saved from sin. The Church has missed much, but she has survived her own errors so long as she has maintained her ambition to serve. It is said too

glibly that the Church has failed ; the truth is, that every other institution has failed. Thrones and democracies, schools and arsenals, markets and statecraft have all been helpless in face of a world crashing to ruin. Two great social facts remain to give us hope : the Church and the home, and both are dominant because they are domestic, and rest upon the stupendous fact of birth ; the one spiritual and the other physical. In a deep sense both are one in love and its passion to serve. If one could imagine the eager labours of converted men and women wiped out of the world, we should see humanity impoverished and despairing, and we should face dreary morrows that have no dawn of light. Men serve till they weary, when actuated by devotion to a cause or creed. They serve for ever when the blood of the converted life throbs in their hearts.

It is here we find the passion for testimony. Life, which is rational and volitional, refuses to be dumb. Its joy will find declaration in song and speech. The news is too good to remain a secret. We can do no other than publish the signs infallible and call upon our neighbours to share our joy. This impulse in Methodism has produced a hymnology which is not always perfect verse, but it arrests the world by its vital thrilling story of conviction, confession, and conversion. The Class Meeting, so distinctive of Methodism, could never have been born had it not been for the tales of conversion that must be told. The lay preachers are the creation of this amazing fact which cannot

wait for official ordination, but with the flush of a new life will tell its story by the wayside. There can be no passionate evangelism where there is no Conversion. It would have no text or warrant, and could lay no spell upon a sinful world. We singers, class-leaders, and preachers may be obedient to church discipline, but we are the children of Conversion. We are concerned in all the issues of public life. We declare our demand for national righteousness and liberty, but our message would be a fussy impertinence were it not that we give our first loyalty to individual Conversion. It is in the interests of those whom Christ would save that we plead that public law should make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong. Our fullest faith is never given to legality. It is focussed in that divine grace which converts the sinner from the error of his way.

It is this central fact which gives to the Church that spontaneity and elasticity which are so impressive. Every great converting movement leaves behind it ecclesiastical structures which are not a building but a growth. General Booth never intended to found a Church, but the Salvation Army, the world over, tends to find for itself permanence as a Church. Great missions never remain fluid and formless. They form a type and preserve it for succeeding generations. John Wesley shrank from the idea of forming a Church. Converts were to be gathered into societies, which should remain in fellowship with the Church of England. He dreaded separation, but it was forced upon him

by the explosive energies of converting grace. The class meeting was an accident ; the sacraments were unpurposed ; lay preaching was an adventure ; but they were the expression of life, and remain to this hour the framework of a world-wide Church. The true builders of the Church are not architects, they are soul-winners. The destiny of the Church is pledged and formed in Conversions more than in Committees and Conferences. John Wesley tells us the real secret of Methodist history when he says : " Everything arose just as the occasion required." Spontaneity was saved from being accidental by the vital purpose of the converted life. They are unfaithful children who refuse elasticity to the Church because of loyalty to its founders. John Wesley would not recognize such Methodists as his spiritual children. He was obstinate in his High Church bias ; it was the miracle of Conversion that drove him out into the highways and markets to form a Church which no Episcopate can bind and no Articles shall fetter. It is the converting passion that laughs at bolts and bars, and dares to say, " the world is my parish." These words are written by one who glories in being a Methodist preacher, and rejoices in the freedom and spontaneity of an Evangelism which finds in Conversion its glory and triumph.

The true test of any Church is life, its greatest victory is birth of life, and the life in which it may glory is the gift of Conversion. Speaking of this test of life, Rev. George Tyrrell affirms that it must involve moral and spiritual fruitfulness in the

deepest sense. He says wisely :¹ " It must at once satisfy and intensify man's mystical and moral need. It must bring the transcendent nearer to his thoughts, feelings, and desires. It must deepen his consciousness of union with God. . . . This is the evidence of Christianity as a personal religion—its power over souls that are already Christian in sympathy and capacity, the soul-compelling power of the spirit of Christ. Any other ' sign,' be it miracle or argument, will appeal only to the faithless and perverse. It may puzzle them, it will never convince them ; it may convert them to the Church, but it cannot convert them to God ; it may change their theology, it cannot change their hearts."

We differ from this scholar in much, but we agree surely that the vital, essential power for the Church is that " new birth " which, on the human side, we call Conversion.

The fact of Conversion explains the unique features of a Christian congregation. It is like no other audience. Psychologically and emotionally it stands alone, and they who would copy the methods by which crowds are drawn in other places, misread the " ethos " of a Christian assembly. The preacher makes demands which no other man may speak. He presumes upon thinking and feeling, which under other conditions would be difficult if not impossible. He declares verities which are still " a stumbling-block " and " foolishness " to most men, and he calls for a response and testimony which cynicism

¹ " Christianity at the Cross Roads," pp. 112, 113.

regards as madness. I never face a Christian congregation, and I speak to audiences under many conditions, but I feel that here there is a subtle and enduring difference. Men, who listen to the Gospel with heart and understanding, assume a different attitude to that with which they hear a lecture or a concert. A political mass meeting may have idealism, passion, intense loyalty to some great cause, but it is in utter contrast to an assembly that makes Conversion its aim. Our congregations are called to faith, and faith is the most tremendous act of the human soul. It is full of paradox, and we only weaken its terrific urgency when we insist so glibly upon its "simplicity." We dislike and dread ritualistic aids to faith, but we should at least recognize its awful claims and problems. It is here that the psychologist will save us from a shallow Evangelism.

We expect from our people, when we preach on Conversion, a faith that, normally, is impossible. They must recognize the final reality of the spiritual. In the knowledge of things they may rely upon the verdict of the senses, as they touch, see, and taste them. In the perception of ideas they have the aid of science and philosophy, and so distance, beauty, sequence, cause and effect become real to them; but the moment they consider Conversion they must think in a realm invisible, intangible, and in much of its revelation beyond even imagination. In this spiritual domain faith finds its supreme certainty, and life its final law. At its bidding men sacrifice immediate gain, solid advantages, and

bodily comfort. They obey motives which to commerce look like lunacy, and they do it with a confidence which disdains all apology. They live by the unseen, and obey voices which are beyond translation, but which come to each man in his own tongue. By this faith man walks consciously in the light of eternity; he sees and judges this planet and its life as from afar. At the same time he plunges into its struggle and sorrow with a passion that delights in sacrifice, but he is impelled by motives which no mere ethical philosophy can name, much less interpret. Such a faith is impossible unless life is endowed with a new faculty, or the functions of the mind are set ablaze with a new and intense illumination.

Faith also demands of us at one and the same moment a sense of desperate need, and a consciousness of absolute confidence. That is a revolution of the mental order. Need fills life with fear; desperate need covers it with dismay. Mere insufficiency creates dread; but conscious guilt, which we call conviction of sin, spells despair. We bid our people in the sanctuary confess that they are sinners; with no hope of recovery in effort, culture, and self-control. There is tragedy in every Christian congregation—"God be merciful to me, a sinner," is the undertone of all worship. At the same moment we are inspired with daring hope, we are confident of the divine favour, and we are firm in our expectation of morrows radiant with grace, purity, and peace. The same people in the same hour sing:

“ Goodness I have none to plead,
Sinfulness in all I see.
I can only bring my need :
God be merciful to me,”

and immediately they are triumphant in their declaration :

“ My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear :
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear :
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And ‘ Father, Abba, Father,’ cry.”

The verses sound a contradiction ; they can only be reconciled in some tremendous event which fuses contrasts into unity, and floods despair with hope. That event is Conversion, and its unifying power is faith.

Faith at once demands surrender and promises victory. It is a reversal of the common order, and yet is the royal joy of converted men and women. We in the Church require not assent to a dogma but obedience to a calling. Our first function is not persuasive but convictive. We seek not approval but submission. We hold out a morality which seems impossible. We declare our natural inability to scale its heights and meet its obligations. We bid men and women lay down the weapons of their rebellion. When they surrender, without a break, we assure them of wondrous victories over sin and the flesh. We declare that all things are possible and, indeed, already actual to the men of faith. This is an amazing paradox. It will sound like insincerity, unless aback of it there is some revolu-

tionary fact which breaks in upon the natural sequence of our moods, and in some wondrous way makes surrender the doorway to sovereignty. This marvel cannot be denied; it is seen in all our churches, and is the distinctive characteristic of all our congregations. It is not the victory of an idea but the conquest of a Person. We surrender, and lo! we prevail. We are lamed and are made royal in the one moment. We give up all and we possess all. This is not a dream; it is a vital deed which is ours in the fact of Conversion. Habit must never abolish the wonder of our hymn:

“ Though late, I all forsake,
My friends, my all resign :
Gracious Redeemer, take, O take,
And seal me ever Thine.”

The greatest feature of faith is our love for the crucified Lord, who died two thousand years ago, amid every token of rejection and contempt, who was actually buried, but who is to-day the most real and powerful personal presence to countless hosts of believers. We do not use the word love in any technical sense, but in ardent, personal, and thrilling reality Jesus is loved.

“ So, through the thunder, comes a human voice,
Saying : ‘ O heart I made, a heart beats here.’ ”

Emotionally, this is the greatest problem that faces the student. It is not easy to maintain loyalty to our greatest leaders while they live. The National Statesman is no sooner entrusted with power than he is doubted. Popularity is the most fleeting of

all possessions. The price of royalty to-day is conspiracy to-morrow. It is harder still to maintain love for the dead, however great. Their personal grip is loosened; their authority wavers; their words, which once rang with final authority, are now a memory rather than a message. The world changes: new problems and tasks appear, and our dead are prisoners of the past. We may give them our reverence, but not our obedience. We are truest to life, when we resent the rule of the dead hand. The wonder of faith is that Jesus to-day speaks the final word. His authority grows and never weakens. His presence is real and vital, and ten thousand times ten thousand men literally love Him more than they do country, friend, wife, or child. They live for Him. They know no higher bliss than to have His company, and they are ready to die for Him. This is the greatest emotional miracle of the world. Not even angels can rival us in this achievement of the heart. Psychology cannot fathom its depths, or philosophy declare its glories. Theology stumbles when it would define this marvel of love. It forces the great apostle to say:¹ "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." This miracle of love rests upon the fact of Conversion. Here it is no irrational ecstasy, no sensuous fervour. It is the sane and spiritual glory of faith.

The fact of Conversion stands firm after centuries of enquiry and criticism. We accept gladly all the scholars can give us of confirmation, but we are not

¹ 1 Corinthians xii. 3.

dependent on their enquiries or bound by their methods. We know and feel and see Conversion in our own hearts, and in the converted folk who are about us. Greater men than we declare the fact with an eloquence we do not possess, but its reality is as sure to us as our own existence. When Prof. Romanes was feeling his way back to the Christian faith, it was the fact of Conversion which had for him the greatest force. He says :¹ " Saint Augustine, after thirty years of age, and other Fathers, bear testimony to a sudden, enduring and extraordinary change in themselves, called conversion. Now this experience has been repeated and testified to by countless millions of civilized men and women in all nations and all degrees of culture." That evidence still holds good, and we possess its verdict in all our Churches. These conversions are not incidents of history, they are the delight of to-day. What Mark Rutherford wrote of yesterday is true of the present hour :² " I can assure my incredulous literary friends, that years ago it was not uncommon for men and women suddenly to awake to the fact that they had been sinners, and to determine that henceforth they would keep God's commandments by the help of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. What is more extraordinary is that they did keep God's commandments for the rest of their lives."

There is no joy so sure as that with which we see Conversions in our Churches. All other questions

¹ " Thoughts on Religion," p. 162.

² " Catharine Furze," p. 358.

of finance, influence, and numbers are trivial compared with this steadfast bliss. Dr. R. W. Dale felt this rapture in Moody and Sankey's Mission in Bingley Hall, Birmingham. He naturally was cautious : his emotion was ever harnessed to judgment, but he is carried out of himself, as he says :¹ " I have seen the sun rise from the top of Helvellyn and the top of the Righi, and there is something very glorious in it ; but to see the light of Heaven suddenly strike on man after man in the course of one evening is very much more thrilling."

That light we must keep alive upon our altars. It will never fade so long as we retain our faith in the reality and triumph of Conversion.

" There is no ruined life beyond the light of heaven,
And compensating grace for every loss is given,
The Coliseum's shell is loved of flower and vine,
And through its shattered rents, the peaceful planets shine."

¹ " The Congregationalist," March, 1875.

PART II.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSION.

CHAPTER I.

The Growth of Personality.

WE must know man as he is if we are to appreciate what Conversion can make of him. We must individualise and study him if we are to understand his relations and duty to God, his aspiration and struggle for the best, and the meaning of his worship, which is always the great act of his deepest self. The interpretation of religion has been enlarged and enriched in recent years by systematic attempts to understand the operations of mind, impulse, and will, and to capture in statement the bloom and fragrance of imagination, memory, and heart. Many schools of psychology have made us their debtors. They have attacked the problem from many angles. Some have laid emphasis on the physical structure of the brain, others on heredity and habit, and still others on environment, education, and impulse, which it is hard to classify. All agree that if we are to declare the final appeal of religion we must take into account the fibre, function, and faculty of man to whom it is addressed. Personality precedes

Conversion, is moulded by it, and the preacher is dumb until he can reach the personal core of the hearer's life.

In Scotland, France, and America, psychology has travelled far. Sometimes it is arrogant with many adventures, but it brings valid tidings of new territories as yet unexplored. In England and Germany this new science has been more cautious, but its contributions to a wise method of Conversion are just as valuable. I do not profess to be a psychologist in any large sense, neither am I a theologian of high attainments, but I should fail in my immediate purpose if I did not avail myself of the suggestions and conclusions established by learned men. We owe very much to Hamilton and Starbuck, De Bois and W. James. Much of what they teach is suggested by men as far apart as Jonathan Edwards and H. W. Beecher. We are thrilled by the stories of Harold Begbie, the records of many a city mission, and the incidents witnessed in our own churches. The studies of G. Steven and James Stalker help us to interpret the great experiences which we have seen to be as real as any fact of life.

There is the psychology that confines itself to the vital processes of mind and will. It thinks more of nerve than morals, and ranks auto-suggestion as being more impressive than the Ten Commandments. Biblical psychology sees in Holy Writ more than the growth of Israel with its lofty monotheism, or the advent of the Evangel with its conquering appeal; it traces the pathway which

personality must tread in its development of the soul and its search for God. Christian psychology regards Jesus as its greatest teacher. He alone knows man through and through. He can read the thought before it becomes a purpose. He measures the resolve before it is a deed. This study has its centre in Conversion. To that goal it travels, and beyond it would show us all the wondrous consequences of devotion, service, and holiness. It calls upon all preachers to be loyal to this supreme idea ; it bids theologians adapt their theories and definitions to this central fact ; and it urges all hearers of the Word never to rest content till they possess the fact and consciousness of Conversion. This mandate we dare not ignore when the very foundations of religion feel the shock of a world upheaval.

It is a great moment when life is first conscious of individuality. It is difficult to appreciate the birth of self-consciousness because childhood at that stage is mute and unable to give its testimony. A child enters life a bundle of appetites, nerves, and functions. It is little more than physical, at best it is sensuous. Its spirituality is not denied, but it is latent. The babe is helpless, dependent on others, with no will beyond the wonderful instinct of self-preservation. As the days pass it becomes conscious of facts which press in upon it. It is itself, though the realization is little more than the throb of sensation or the quiver of nerve. We may believe that even in dim moments impressions are stored away in a subconscious self, but actually

the child lives only upon the plane of sense. In course of time impressions repeat themselves into an experience which is genuine though elementary and unformed. Now the child begins to feel, desire, think, and will. The real conscious self has been born at last. Individuality is affirmed, though personality is not yet realized, when a child can look the universe in the face, and say, "I am!" "I know!" "I will!" All unperceived it is a tragic crisis. We emerge from it without realizing its terrific loneliness. The unit has become personal. It must now set out upon its solitary career of perception, ambition, struggle, victory or defeat.

" So rounds he to a separate mind,
From whence clear memory may begin,
As though the frame that binds him in
His isolation grows defined."

Père Gratry tries to record his impressions of this moment when he was five years of age.¹ "I remember in my first infancy, before the age of reason (as it is called), having felt this impression of Being in all its vividness. A great effort against an external mass, distinct from me, whose immovableness amazed me, made me utter the words, 'I am!' The thought came to me for the first time. The surprise arose soon to the most profound astonishment and to the keenest wonder. With transport I repeated, 'I am!' 'Being!' 'To be!' The whole religious depth of my soul, poetic and intelligent, was in a moment awakened, stirred

¹ "Souvenirs de ma Jeunesse," p. 2, quoted by G. Steven.

within me. A penetrating light, which I believe I still see, enveloped me. I saw there was Being; that Being was beautiful, blessed, gracious, full of mystery. After forty years I still see all these internal facts and the physical details that surrounded me."

It is not given to many children to have so vivid a power of recollection and analysis, but in some such way all of us begin the lonely journey of selfhood. We discover that we stand apart from others. We are separate from the vast materialism of our world. We can study and judge. We can choose and decide. We make our own path, think our own thoughts, select our own friendships, and with ultimate and amazing freedom decide upon our attitude to God and His world. As we advance we learn that on our choice depends our destiny of good or evil, of honour or shame. No theory or philosophy, excuse or evasion saves us from our own responsibility. To perception conscience adds its witness. We are not items in a heap, or figures in a total. Each stands in the centre of his own world. He is solitary, individual, and must choose for himself the path he will tread. Individuality is a tremendous fact, and it is sacred as well as mighty when it is clothed with the powers and prerogative of a fully developed personality. The steep we must climb is from the unit to the individual, on to the personal and spiritual, till we reach¹ "A perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

¹ Ephesians iv. 13.

When individuality becomes self-conscious, it finds itself invested with great powers. They are common to all men. Deep-rooted instincts are a native capital we cannot ignore. They appear to rest upon the animal side of life, but they really modify and may really enrich our higher impulses. They are as powerful as any habits we may choose to form, and are more enduring. However high we may rise in the scale of life we never escape their call and pressure. They are well known to every student: fear, trust, like, repulsion, anger, love, various excitements and consequent reactions. None can say where their influence ends. They begin in nerve and reach up to spirit. They are rooted in tissue, and lo! they are found in the Day of Judgment. Prof. William McDougall gives the widest range to these instincts when he says:¹ "The instinctive impulses determine the ends of all activities, and supply the driving power by which all mental activities are sustained; and all the complex intellectual apparatus of the most highly developed mind is but a means towards these ends, is but the instrument by which these impulses seek their satisfactions, while pleasure and pain do but serve to guide them in their choice of the means."

This assertion is very bold, but we shall do well to heed it when we are tempted to regard elementary instincts as unfriendly to spiritual life. Too often they are viewed as unmoral, if not immoral. Such a judgment is negative and chill, and fails to

¹ "Introduction to Social Psychology," p. 43.

recognize the fact that even Nature rests upon a Divine will and a moral order. Religion has been cruelly wronged by ascetic and monastic teaching that religion is a repression of the love of life, a denial of our natural and vital instincts. Our instincts are not brutalities that seek our ruin, or passions which would drive us over the precipice. They are disastrous when they are morbid and inflamed by sin, but really they are our inherent powers which can be marshalled, drilled, and equipped to aid that tremendous moral victory which saves the soul. The convert is called to a supernatural life. He is not bidden to walk in ways that are unnatural.

Life has a finer goal than self-gratification, and therefore it is equipped with conscience that the instincts may be curbed and balanced. We shall meet this faculty often in our discussion of Conversion. We now look upon it as lifting personality above the mere play of instincts. It has many names : the moral reason, the witness of good, the inward monitor, and the divine spark which never allows us to entirely forget our divine origin and destiny. It is a moral urge towards righteousness. It is resistance to the impulses that would carry us to immoral ease of unholy gain. It establishes within the mind a moral standard which has authority and finality. It is within us all. It is our deepest, truest self. It is a ceaseless protest against evil government in personal life. It is in the young as well as the old. It is not the consequence of condition, it is written in the very fibre

of life. It is not the result of education, though it owes much to discipline and culture. It is native and natural, and yet Schoberlin defines it as¹ "The organ for the juridical relation of man to God," and Luther calls it "A witness touching those things in which man has to do with God."

It creates discomfort in presence of evil, and enforces upon us the truth that goodness is our natural goal and should be the centre of our ambition. It passes beyond self and claims to judge systems and societies. It is the nerve of the reformer and the blood of the martyr. It sets men in battle array against oppression, lies, greed and lust. It provokes anger and yet saves it from becoming an unmeaning and foaming rage. It is more than any prudential morality. Its supreme claim is not self-interest. It refuses the bribes of sin and welcomes the sufferings of virtue, and feels all the time that it has chosen the better part. It troubles us, but it makes us triumphant. It offers a crown of thorns, but its coronation is the noblest splendour that can come to man. We do well to honour it as the salt of society. It is even better to obey it in personal life.

The permanence of conscience is the surest hope of man. It may be seared, ignored or resisted, but it is never quite destroyed. Could we imagine life deprived of conscience, we should see war without end, chaos without remedy, and that final moral disaster for which there can be no hope. The only

¹ "Christian Psychology," James Stalker, p. 237.

mercy for such a life would be swift and utter destruction. Consciousness without conscience is never quite human. Carlyle sees this clearly, and we prize his words : " There is an Infinite in Man which, with all his cunning, he cannot quite bury under the Finite." It abides the final court of moral appeal, and every movement towards Conversion must be along lines which conscience can approve.

Some writers go so far as to make conscience the final authority in religion. We do not agree unless there is given to conscience a much larger meaning than we claim for it as an item of equipment in personality. At the same time we believe that it is the sanction and the safeguard of religion. It will protect it from the grotesque and false ; it will keep worship sane and balanced ; it will restrain theology from pedantry, mechanism, and superstitious assumptions ; and it will guard the Church from all dogma, teaching and ritual that would insult the moral sense. It will not tolerate Calvinistic or Arminian notions of God which offend our moral instincts, and it will claim to judge our eschatology by the demands of instinctive righteousness. The greatest of the apostles is ever ready to turn aside from high doctrine and missionary dreams to enforce the dictates of the normal conscience. Wives are to be in subjection to their husbands, husbands are to love their wives. Children must obey their parents, and parents are to beware of provoking their children to wrath. Servants and masters are to be faithful to reciprocal obligations,

and citizens are to obey the laws of the magistrate and serve the needs of the community. His religion has a flaming vision for its birth, and a celestial coronation for its goal, but right through it is true to ethical demands. Above all things, his religion is a good life. No passion of revival or ecstasy of Conversion must be allowed to drive us from that fundamental truth.

It is impossible to exaggerate the influence of conscience. Dr. G. Steven is as true as he is eloquent when he says:¹ "Without its presence personality of any kind would be impossible; indeed it is the very core of the character. It is the power by which we are emancipated from the control of the instincts, and which directs the individuality to a worthy end. It opens up the deepest and broadest conception of the universe; it gives the end for which men live; lifts the strong and the weak into another world, enabling them to put under their feet every selfish impulse, taking every thought and every imagination of the heart captive; changing instinct, it may be, into a passion for righteousness, and turning genius and energy alike into the service of their fellow-men."

Personality has other native endowments which lie hidden in the depths of being; they are too subtle for definition. They elude the enquirer, for they are covered by inherited tendencies, ancestral ideas, racial tastes, and unspoken memories which dimly suggest our divine origin. It is easy to give a name to this unfathomable mystery. We call it

¹ "The Psychology of the Christian Soul," pp. 11, 12.

subconscious and subliminal. We can give it the old sweet evangelical term : heart ; but when we have woven our theories and exhausted our vocabulary, there it abides, real life, but a hidden miracle, which in great crises leaps to the surface and amazes us by its vivid perceptions and vital experiences. None have heard its constant cry, or read its wondrous possibilities but God and His Son Jesus Christ. It is within all men, young and old, learned and illiterate, good and bad. It is the indestructible essence of personality. It may be disfigured and cursed from its birth. It may lie crushed under a hideous load of sin and guilt, but it is a possibility of enduring hope. It is the focal centre whence, at the bidding of the Evangel, there may arise a response and devotion which we doubt, because we do not know the hidden realities that are within man. Miss Underhill calls it a special, mystic sense which is to be found hidden in the depths of personality. She is not content with the vague term "subconscious ;" she believes that it is most conscious, even when it is silent. She speaks of it as "the Dweller in the Innermost," and says of its ministry upon us :¹ "Heart, reason, will, are there in full action, drawing their energy, not from the shadow-show of sense, but from the deeps of true Being, where a lamp is lit and a consciousness awake of which the sleepy crowd remains oblivious."

It may be truly defined as man's power of response to God. It is the eternal quality that makes it

¹ "Mysticism," p. 75.

possible for us to hear the Voice from Beyond, to pray and receive the answer, to seek and find the treasure that is beyond price, and ultimately to so open the recesses of personal being that we become "Temples of the Holy Ghost." It is the awful power by which kinship is asserted between the human and divine. It invests humanity even in ruins with a grandeur that is amazing and eternal, and it must save the church and pulpit from lordly patronage or sullen despair in its approach to men. The mightiest thing in the world is personal life. The goal of all our religion is the development of noblest personality, and we know it can only be done through that divine and redemptive Personality which remains the fairest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. Shakespeare is guilty of no exaggeration when he says:¹ "What a piece of work is a man ! How noble in reason ! how infinite in faculty ! in form, in moving how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a god !"

When we declare Conversion we would glorify our Lord ; at the same time we must reverence the poorest sinner who hears our Gospel.

Personality has great elements found in all men, but it has the utmost wealth of variety. The study of temperament is imperative to the man who would declare Conversion. The differences that separate men into distinctive types must not be overlooked if we would apply the Evangel to each as well as to all. We must treat men fairly, while

¹ "Hamlet," Act II., Scene 2.

we view them reverently. Our appeal is a judgment as much as it is "good news," and discrimination is more excellent than denunciation. Dorner has done well to give this subject learned treatment in his "Christian Ethics," but even he would confess that there are subtle distinctions which demand sympathy rather than statement.

Temperament is responsible for many a social chasm which can never be bridged save in the power and philosophy of Christian faith. Its range is almost infinite, and accounts in some degree for hopeless moral inertia on the one hand and flaming spiritual ambition on the other. Some men appear to be born vicious, while to others virtue seems easy and natural. In some men there is a native facility to evil, virtue is only possible to them after a struggle of sweat and tears. In other men, goodness is almost an inheritance. To fall into sin requires a positive effort in which they must defy the pressure of heredity and training. To judge men so far apart by one stiff, mechanical standard is foolish and unjust. Psychology as well as faith should save us from such a sin against charity.

Differences in temperament may involve evil which is free from personal condemnation. Every man is not responsible for the burden he has to carry, or the vitiated tastes which have come to him without his choice. We are racial products as well as personal beings. Our differences may speak of climate as truly as of character. The moral standards of the tropics are distinctive from those of colder zones, and the herald of Conversion must

take them into account. We are, more than we acknowledge, the product of heredity, training, atmosphere, and physical condition. Still more are we shaped by subtle, incalculable forces which science can scarcely name, much less define. The element of surprise is in every man. We should make wiser allowance for its influence did we know life as Christ our Lord knew it. All this is not to destroy that responsibility which is inseparable from personality, but it should modify our judgments, and enable us to expect in Conversion these infinite variations which will save us from any cast-iron system, whether in faith or philosophy. We must allow for predispositions and variations of type if we are to reach wisely those great human identities which keep us moral and make us one in spite of contrast. No two men are alike, and yet we know that all men need God and may find Him, and in their discovery enter upon a new life.

It is enough for our purpose to view temperamental differences according to a classification which Dr. James Stalker¹ has made familiar.

There is the sanguine temperament. It is full of vitality, ruddy with health, and possessed of great charm. It sings in labour, and finds music in the dullest conditions. It is a joyous comradeship and an inspiring leadership. It is the valour which attempts the forlorn hope, and it is the consolation that breathes light into the deepest sorrow. It is a splendid endowment for the man of affairs. It fills the commonplace with romance, and it is a

¹ "Christian Psychology," Appendix A.

vital gift which should be highly prized. Even when the sanguine man is unconverted there is a glow and attraction that makes harsh judgment difficult. In spite of folly, faults, and sin, his neighbours call him "a good fellow," "an enemy to no one but himself." We cannot accept this amiable and lazy tolerance. The sanguine man needs Conversion, but we must not insult conscience by denying to him a beauty of disposition which really does enrich his social circle. This disposition fits a man for heroic enterprise. Our country has discovered this capacity for valour in buoyant youth. It is to be found in all our congregations, and men of this spirit are not to be moved by the terrors of judgment so much as by flaming visions of pure and high adventure to which they are called by the grace of God. The men, who are imperious and restless for achievement, need Conversion, and when they yield to the spell of our Evangel they become easily the dauntless leaders in Christian chivalry. When we tell them "the Son of God goes forth to war," their temperament will urge them to "follow in His train."

There is the phlegmatic temperament. It is cold and slow. It avoids emotional extremes, never climbs the heights of ecstasy, and never sinks to the depths of depression. It moves safely in the commonplace, and is suspicious of an enthusiasm which regards the world well lost for an ideal. It has no imperious ambitions, and seeks no great adventures by land and sea. It is not so lovable as the sanguine temperament. In sin it is sullen,

and in religion it is slow. It lacks the magnetic element, and yet it must not be ignored, nor will it fail to respond to the Gospel of the love of God. Its virtue is prudence, its vice is selfishness, its strength is caution, and its weakness is fear. It needs Conversion, and we are foolish if we do not seek to address our appeal to it with perceptive skill. The dull cold man can be captured. His temperament will remain, and he will save us from frenzy and impetuous folly. He will render that critical service that is essential to the well-balanced life. He will compel us to count the cost of our sacred enterprise, and save us from the extravagance which ignores the inevitable sequence of cause and effect. There is a place even in Conversion for the chill blood and slow pulse. Christ comes to Thomas as truly as to Peter, and we must allow no barrier of temperament to shut men out from the "good news" which is salvation for men of every shade and type. Christ, in His disciples, secured the unity of contrasts. So must we who follow in His steps.

There is the passionate temperament. It is masterful, full of vital force, and lives in extremes. It loves intensely, and hates furiously. It will not brook repression, and hates compromise. It is self-assertive, and inclined to be boastful. It is fearless, and carries its fellows along the tide of its own impetuosity. It is an enthusiast in its choice, whether of good or evil. A man of this type will either be a radiant saint or a sinner whose vices are aggressive and lustful. He is most difficult to

arrest, but, when captured by a vision of the Cross, he is a wondrous trophy, and by his surrender becomes a passionate witness for his Lord. His religion may be volcanic, but the very fires shall nourish the richest vineyards of grace and service. We are inclined to fear men of this disposition. They disturb us when we would gently lead the flock. They need Conversion, and experience declares that they will respond to the message of the Crucified Lord. When they are won, they are miracles of grace, and reinforce us by their marvelous revulsion from their old sins of passion and pride. John the passionate can become the apostle of gentlest love, and Paul the imperious can be so changed that he will become all things to all men if only he can save some. Ecclesiasticism has little to say to men of this type. Instinctively they resist its control, and resent its restriction; but the dramatic change of Conversion and the faith that "all things are possible" to him who believes reach them with compelling force. In any case these men will turn the world upside down. They can be won for a sacred and redemptive revolution.

There is the gloomy temperament. It is the easy victim of pessimism. It is given to mournful brooding, and sees all things through a haze of tears. This man refuses to be comforted with the commonplaces of material progress in which most men pride themselves. He is sure the worst has yet to be, and the morrows will inevitably add to his woe. His sins are without jollity and are sullen and hopeless. When he is forced to look on self

and life, he is plunged into despair, and will even regard death as a way of escape, were he not afraid of the terror-filled shadows which lie beyond our ken. He needs Conversion, and for him the light may shine, and towards it he can turn his feet. His temperament will give tone and qualities to all his days, but, when converted, it will fit him to be a prophet and a mystic. His sincerity will be tragic, but it will be intense, and save ordinary men from flippancy and empty gaiety. He forces us to realize our responsibilities, and never allows the Cross to be forgotten. Some great power is needed to lead him out of weeping egotism, but, when won by a vision of the Man of Sorrows, he brings to the Church qualities of reverent meditation which we need in these crowded noisy days. Hope is not easy to him, but, when attained, it is a mighty victory which is full of assurance for others. The son of the evening can become the child of the morning. Jeremiah, in his Lamentations, may win a place in history as typical and prophetic of the Saviour of the World. Our Evangel is light as well as love, and it is addressed to men whose habitation is in the house of shadows.

These distinctions in temperament are not as separate as some writers would affirm. They merge into each other, their gradations are infinite and appear often to respond to local and temporary conditions. In so far as classification involves judgment, it should always be tempered with charity, and should be modest, inasmuch as the deepest and most subtle factors in personality are not fully known.

Some would trace temperaments to a physical origin. They speak of nerve, fibre, and fluids. They point to health and occupation and food. All these things have their place, but they are not enough to explain differences that are mental and moral. Some see in temperamental differences qualities of race. They point us to Hebrew, Roman, Greek, Saxon, and Celtic peoples as settled types. Schleiermacher speaks of "national temperaments," but this classification is not sufficient, for we find all these differences in the children of one common stock. Some find the root of temperament in climate. The phlegmatic and gloomy have their habitat in chilly zones, while the sanguine and passionate are the children of the tropics. No one will deny the real influence of climate on temperament, but it is grotesque to find in it the vital cause of personal variations which are found in all zones. Others regard temperament as incidental to growth. The sanguine is the heritage of youth ; the passionate is the endowment of early middle life ; while men grow phlegmatic and gloomy as the withering touch of age is realized. The explanation is too simple to be true. In all study of life we do well to avoid classifications that are plausible and easy. Some youths are never sanguine, and some old age is never fearful. Varieties of disposition are not to be explained in any such shallow way.

The causes of temperament are too subtle and complex for any full explanation. As related to Conversion we are not compelled to dissect personality, but to study it that we may be wise in our

approach to men. A scientific analysis is not necessary to the preacher, but he must have a true and tolerant judgment of men if he is to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. It is as we know personality that we shall understand the special temptations, the easily-besetting sins that are the peril of temperament. The mercurial man is open to sins of exaggeration, fickleness, and falsehood. The phlegmatic man is liable to the dull sins that breed in sloth, and curse personality with inertia. The passionate man is prone to sins of pride and all the lusts of the flesh. The maddest vices will not alarm him, and in the reign of the brute he will boast. The gloomy man yields easily to secret sins which are the ugly spawn of dull brooding. Vice in him is not so much a passion as it is a slow poison in the blood. Each man brings his own problem to the herald of Conversion. He must be welcomed along his own avenue. Pious generalities will miss him. He must hear the Word in his own tongue. When he is converted he will still be shaped by temperament. He will remain himself even when possessed by Another. Disposition will tone his testimony and shape his service. Here is no cause for complaint. We should rejoice the more that the Gospel of Conversion can reach and change the destiny of all men however wide and enduring may be their differences of temperament.

Emphasis is laid upon the study of personality that faith may not falter because the method and experience of Conversion vary. It is bigotry and

not knowledge which claims for certain types of religion superior measures of divine grace. Such a view tempts some to spiritual pride, and sinks others into a dreary depression. The Gospel opportunity is one ; the fact of Conversion is one ; but we enter it by different doors, and we find in it that which personal temperament enables us to grasp. All find in it regeneration, but the new life will declare itself in a language that is all its own. Professor A. Coe, after elaborate study, has reached the conclusion that¹ "the varying emotional aspects of our religious experiences are to be ascribed not to the inscrutable ways of God, but to ascertainable differences in men's mental constitutions." If we grasped this truth firmly we should be more catholic in our judgments, and tolerant in our faith. It is fatally easy to make our own experience the standard for others, but such a resolve leads into a hard obstinacy that would restrict human freedom and even bind the Holy Spirit in fetters. We know men in whom religion is evidently a miracle. We stand amazed before its incredibility. Other men have a religion which creates no surprise ; it is normal, and we see in it no cause for wonder and rapture. It is not because the one is Conversion by grace, and the other is growth in Nature's order. In both there is decision, which is the centre of Conversion. In both God's voice has been heard and obeyed, but they differ through necessities in their personal self, and through their very differences they contribute to the chorus and beauty of the house-

¹ "The Spiritual Life," p. 140.

hold of faith. Our children differ in taste and type in every home. We are enriched by each individuality as it is merged in domestic love. So the children of God will ever be personally distinct, but together they form the beauty of Zion, and the chorus of the Redeemed.

The importance of personality must be acknowledged if we would preserve reality in religion. We are always in danger of seeing faith evaporate into pious generalities. Here is the chasm between science and religion. The former seeks to eliminate the personal factor in its enquiries. It refuses to regard the individual except in his relation to a cosmic order. It conducts its experiments and enquiries with detachment. It speaks in impersonal and universal terms. It does not fully succeed in obliterating the personal element, for even a scientist sees what he looks from quite as much as what he looks at, but that is his aim in the interests of pure science. Religion is personal all through, a personal God in relation with personal man. The moment it moves from that centre it ceases to be actual and vital, and becomes academic and abstract. Science may offer me a bill of fare, and may even assign to each item on the menu its precise value in nutrition. Religion goes further. It actually provides the bread of life, and bids me sit down at the banquet of living grace. The science of religion is one thing, and we do not deny its value for the student. The Gospel of religion is vastly more important; it brings to the hearer Conversion rather than instruction. Prof. W.

James declares this fact clearly :¹ " So long as we deal with the cosmic and the general, we deal only with the symbols of reality, but as soon as we deal with private and personal phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the term."

There is an air of superior magnanimity in the scientific pose that the enquirer must not obtrude himself upon his investigations; or that the individual does not count if only the sum of knowledge is increased. It may do for the laboratory, among test tubes and blow-pipes, but it is a cruel vanity among men who sin, suffer, and would repent. We are not supremely concerned with cases to be studied; we must reach the lives that can be rescued and redeemed. The tragic blight which has fallen upon much religion and even worship is unreality, and the root-cause is the lack of the personal touch and appeal. The preacher who covets many converts will find in pastoral visitation one of the surest ways of approach through personal temperament to the inmost soul.

Ritualism is almost as perilous as vague generalities, because it does not allow for personal and emotional idiosyncrasies. It expects a mechanical response to identical impression at the ringing of a bell, the elevation of the host, or the march of a procession. It forgets that all men are not equally open to the sensuous and symbolic. It expects the mediæval to capture men in whose veins there ferments all modern restlessness. It offers to the

¹ " Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 498.

ambitious and imperious mind a tame subjection to signs and tokens that have for him no living message. It demands the allegiance of the sanguine and phlegmatic to an imagery which was framed for the infancy of the Church. It uses no discrimination ; closes eleven out of the twelve gates into the city, and places as guardian one of doubtful culture, arrayed in fanciful attire. It may secure devotees ; it may even secure converts among men of a certain type, but it makes no vital appeal that is infinitely individual because it is divinely universal. William Perkins' word is still needed by the priests : "Thou art a Minister of the Word ; mind thy business." The word is of no avail if it mumbles generalities in a show. It must seek and reach the individual soul to whom it is addressed by the Father of us all.

The purpose of Conversion is to create a Christian personality. It is the aim of the Gospel and the will of the Incarnation. It does not fail when it is put to the test. Its triumphs are the songs of progress, and they are the psalm of hope for our world. It produces personal transformations that seem magical, and they abide in enduring and unselfish service. It achieves this result in spite of the widest contrasts in temperament and endowment. It enriches personality with a divine quality, and leads men and women into the ways of the Son of man. It is the work of a Personality, the one supreme Personality of the world's history. Jesus has never ceased to challenge men to accept His friendship and His deliverance, and to become

as He was. It is not a system winning credence. It is a Saviour who says : " Follow Me." Dr. G. Steven gives prominence to this personal element :¹ " Now if the mind could be concentrated on Christ, Christ Himself would do the rest. It is personality that impresses personality. The Divine Personality of our Lord appeals to that element of the divine in our personality, calls it forth, gives it strength, and will finally give it mastery. This is what the Spirit does. ' He takes of the things that are Christ's and shows them to men. He glorifies Christ.' Somehow a man comes to see that Christ's life is the true life, is the ' good ' which he has always and everywhere been seeking ; the answer to all his questionings, the solution of all his difficulties. He desires Him. The reason evangelical preaching has been so fruitful in the past is that it has dealt so largely with the exhibition of Christ in His person and His work."

Life follows the personal touch and vision and message. Personality is born from above when it can say for itself :

A second look He gave, which said :

" I freely all forgive ;

My life was for thy ransom paid,

I died that thou may'st live."

¹ " The Psychology of the Christian Soul," p. 254.

CHAPTER II.

A Study of the Soul.

WE now enter definitely the spiritual realm. We shall see man occupy a unique place in the cosmic order. Prof. Huxley, while he places men in a zoological series, admits:¹ "Whether from them or not, man is assuredly not of them." He is a citizen of a spiritual world. He owes Nature his birth; his body will fall back into its physical origins, but all the time he transcends Nature. He is other than it. The creature becomes a personality, and the personality discovers a soul. The final authority and reality for him are spiritual. Mr. Bradley is very bold in his axiom: "Outside of spirit there is not and cannot be any reality, and the more anything is spiritual the more it is inevitably real."

We do not venture among ghostly phantoms and superstitious credulities. The world of spirit is real, the consciousness of soul is valid, the government of moral order is as solid as that of physical

¹ "Man's Place in Nature," p. 152.

law. We would get rid of all idea of subjective hallucination when we talk about the soul. Spirituality is not Spiritualism, it is truth and no device of trickery. It is not so much that man has a soul: he is a soul. Take that away and he is dehumanized, and falls back to shameful, solitary kinship with the beasts of the field. Prof. Drummond often translated the New Testament word "soul" into "self." If a man loses his soul, though he gains the whole world, he has lost himself. With the soul man wills his destiny. There is the seat of self-government, and as Martineau reminds us:¹ "The preferential power which we suppose ourselves to possess is not illusory; on close analysis of the process of volition it will not turn out to be an effect involving no alternative, so that we are not creatures of our past."

It is because of the consciousness of soul that our relation to God is more than that of the creature. It is not enough to speak of the "Absolute," "Omnipresent Energy," "Power not ourselves," "Universal Substance," or even "Universal Inference." The soul demands kinship, communion, and if need be, chastening. Spirit will hold speech with Spirit. Once let this fact slip and Religion is surrendered, conversion is without meaning or value, and we are of all men the most wretched. We would not ignore man's relationship to the world about him. His physical and social ties and duties are of vast importance. He is linked to both the dust and stars. We do not deny that

¹ "A Study of Religion," II., p. 183.

evolution has given attractive interpretation of his origin and many of his functions. Let science and metaphysics tell all they know or imagine of man, but the centre of his personality, the ruling fact in all he is or can ever be, is Soul. It is there we must come as we would study the fact and philosophy of Conversion. The word has suffered much in some Evangelical hands. It has been associated with morbid introspection and pretentious sentiment, but it remains the supreme thing in life, the vital treasure which the Deity would redeem at all costs. We would study the soul with all reverence. We feel our limitations for such a task. We owe much to philosophers, theologians, and psychologists, who have blazed a path for our feet. We must pursue our quest, or we shall be dumb when men cry to us : "What must I do to be saved ?"

We are content with the Scriptural division of human nature into body, soul, and spirit. Soul is the intermediate stratum in personality linked on to the flesh below and the spirit above. It is the seat of all the possibilities of good and evil. On its choice depend all the issues of triumph or tragedy. It is easy to make the distinction between soul and spirit too definite. The Bible sometimes uses the terms interchangeably, but generally the cleavage holds true. The body is rooted in the physical, and lives upon that plane. Its sins are gluttony and lust. Its virtues are abstinence and chastity. The soul is the centre of reason and will. Its sins are pride and selfishness ; its virtues are humility, generosity, valour, and, above all,

aspiration for God. The spirit is the power that rises into knowledge of God, communion with Him, and surrender to His will. When it is the seat of government then all life is filled with light and flooded with harmony. This is the highest destiny open to the sons of men.

The most solemn question before personality is where shall the seat of government be placed? In body, soul, or spirit? The answer rests with the soul; for in the body is a bondage to be escaped, and in the spirit is the victory of a liberty which can only be achieved in absolute surrender to the Eternal Spirit. The soul is the awful battlefield of contending possibilities. To it the appeal of Conversion must be addressed, that it may climb out of the sins of the flesh, and the pride of this world, into the white light of the children of the Spirit.

We need not linger over the mysteries of the subconscious soul, though it is full of fascination. Scholars are wrestling with these great problems, and we accept their conclusions as, at least, tentative declarations of truth. They explain much that is difficult, but they really only force the mystery of consciousness further back. To call the unfathomed depths of being "the subliminal self," to separate perceptions into central, marginal, and extra-marginal is not of great assistance to the preacher. The fact of perception, and especially moral and spiritual cognition, is the marvel that fills us with wonder. We acknowledge the general agreement that beneath the moving seas of will and thought,

choice and deed, there are in all of us ocean depths of being never fully fathomed or explored till we find our eternal home in God. Away in those mystic depths personality is born. There are hidden away ancestral memories and habits. There we are linked in profoundest kinship to all that has been or that will ever be. There are stored impressions, incidents, and voices we had thought lost and forgotten. There is the awful doorway through which God comes to us, and there are the awesome books that will be opened in the Day of Judgment for our shame or song. There self lurks till it is called to intelligence, will, and worship, and there the soul is draped to take its place in the commerce of life. It is the deepest, most august spot in the universe. We go from chamber to chamber to find the sleeping spirit. It eludes our investigations, till suddenly it leaps to consciousness and realizes the outer world of phenomena, struggle, service, and worship.

This hidden self flits before us in dream and trance, and in what the scientist calls "unconscious cerebration," but which we regard as movings of that Spirit which is the breath of God in man. These tremors are unharnessed energies waiting the call to consciousness and witness. All men agree that Religion is the mightiest force which can appeal to these hidden depths. We do not agree with the writer who says: "God speaks to man only through the subconscious," for that would be to ignore the message of Holy Writ, the ministry of the sacraments, and the testimony of the saints ;

but it is certain that in Conversion we must not ignore those vital recesses where the Spirit of God does His secret and constant work.

The definition of the subconscious soul given by Prof. W. James has become almost classic:¹ "It is the abode of everything that is latent, the reservoir of everything that passes unrecorded or unobserved. It contains, for example, such things as all our momentarily inactive memories, and it harbours the springs of all our obscurely motivated passions, impulses, likes, dislikes, and prejudices; our intentions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and in general all our non-rational operations come from it. . . . It is also the fountain head of much that feeds our religion. In persons deep in the religious life, as we have abundantly seen—and this is my conclusion—the door into this region seems unusually wide open; at any rate, experiences making their entrance through that door have had emphatic influence in shaping religious history."

These psychological conclusions are not essential to our advocacy of Conversion, but it is a source of some strength to know that the boldest scholarship is forced to reckon among its surest phenomena those strange impressions which our Evangelical fathers called "the movings of the Spirit."

We look with reverence upon a little child. It is the most wonderful flower in the universe. Its need is the greatest and its possibilities are the wealthiest in heaven or earth. It is more than the

¹ "Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 483.

natural product of physical generation. It is much more than a future worker or citizen or fighter. It is neither an encumbrance, a source of income, or a toy. It is a soul, though it knows it not, and though the subconscious self is scarcely stirred to sensibility. It is the heir of all the ages, and the prophet of all the morrows. Away down in its heart, unspoken and unrealized, are memories, instincts, aptitudes, repulsions, and choices which will write a living story that may have its chronicle in the "Lamb's Book of Life."

The child is studied by two schools. One sees in him a healthy young animal, and nothing more; the other hails him as a young spirit fresh from the presence of God. One can only find in him ganglia of nerve-centres, bone and blood, physical faculties and functions. The other discovers in him spirit only partly draped, and believes with Froebel that "the unconsciousness of a child is rest in God." Both are extreme views in which exaggeration has become folly. It is quite clear that materialism is no sufficient explanation of the child, for it ignores some of the surest facts of child-consciousness. These facts are not written, for definition is beyond the child; they are hardly a prayer, little more than the quiver of the unconscious soul, but we see their reality in the beauties of growth, the kindling of ambition, and in the dawn of love, trust, and worship. An extravagant sentimentalism does not explain the child. It may be true that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," but it is evident that materialism lies about us at the same time. The

child has cravings, appetites, and a perverse taste for evil. Children may be angels, but they have feet to tread the solid road, and hands to grasp common tools. We do not honour the child by making it ghostly. To confess it has a body only enhances our reverence for the soul, which can lift its whole life into harmony with the highest.

The relation of the young child to Conversion is full of interest and perplexity. The psychology of the child is full of keen research with doubtful results. Most thinkers are agreed that in every child there is a native instinct for religion, and that the story of Jesus, as embodied in the Christian Gospel, will appeal to a child as no other message can. Mr. Saunders quotes Dr. Coe as saying: "The spiritual life is strongest when it is most akin to habit and instinct. . . . Children can be truly religious, truly Christian. . . . The imitative, impulsive, habit-forming faculties, in which they are richest, are a proper soil for spiritual seed." Dr. Coe affirms with confidence,¹ "That the thought of the world is turning, as never before, to childhood as one of the key-positions in the whole campaign of Christianity in the world." A child's aptitude for religion is proved by crowding testimonies from those who work in Junior and Primary Departments. They find it easy to believe and pray. Dependence, which is the central nerve of religion, is natural to them. Our Cradle Rolls are not the sentimental folly which some suppose. A child instinctively is a dreamer, lover, and hero-

¹ "Religion of a Mature Mind," p. 283.

worshipper, and these qualities lay him open to the appeal of Jesus. The message of Conversion must be adapted to the realities of the child life. To bid it repent of sins of which it is ignorant, and turn away from rebellion and corruption of which it is unconscious, is cruel folly. It calls for an insincerity which is the subtle poison of future unbelief.

No one can say the year when religion becomes consciously real to a child. The human soul is not the prisoner of a time-table, and cannot be judged by schedule. Here all the infinite differences of temperament operate, and they make dogmatism insolent and intolerable. None dare say the year when a child cannot respond to the voice of the Spirit. Who would be mad enough to rob a child of a spiritual birthright, even though it be only a possibility? Our churches cannot any longer refuse church-membership to children and keep them in the outer courts, or refuse them the holy intimacy of the Lord's Table. Such exclusion of the child is treason against the Babe of Bethlehem, and it is perilously like sin against the Holy Ghost. Luke, the doctor, goes further than most would venture when he tells us¹ that the unborn child of Elizabeth rejoiced at the story of Mary and her Babe. Science dares to-day to speak of mighty prenatal influences which bear upon personality, and we refuse to allow the religious appeal to be exiled from any province of human life. We believe that in every child of every clime and

¹ Luke i. 41.

condition there is a soul which can obey the converting word. It is the glory of an eternal kinship with the Divine. It should fill every parent and teacher with wonder and joy that every little child may follow the boy Christ and go up to the Temple, as to his Father's house. The Christian faith, above all other forces, has liberated and beautified child life. It has given civilization a new conception of the greatness and sanctity of the child. It has freed the little ones from the grinding tyranny of pit, mill, and factory. It has forced the State to welcome the tasks of guardianship. We should be eager to accept the witness of the little ones to the blessed reality of religion.

Knowledge and statement grow clearer as we approach the Soul of the Adolescent. Now we see the fermentation of life's vintage. It is the crisis full of tremendous possibilities, and is restless with all the issues of character. It is the threshold of puberty, and therefore full of the most tremendous promise and the most terrific hazard. We cannot agree with Starbuck when he says, that "In a certain sense the religious life is an irradiation of the reproductive instinct"; but there is no doubt that the fact of sex does react upon the awakening soul, but we must avoid the extravagance which would deny the wonderful and mighty sainthood of old age. Youth is the natural time for the awakening of individual religious consciousness. There are signs of it in childhood; the full development is in manhood and womanhood, but the dawn is in adolescence. It is the age of idealism, and with

a strange paradox the idealism must survive a period of natural doubt. In one of his elaborate charts Starbuck shows that fifty-three per cent. of girls and seventy-nine per cent. of boys pass through a period of scepticism. One cause of this sad phenomenon is the dogmatic literalism and the impossible demands with which religion too often is taught to youth. The chief cause of youthful doubt is the fact that everyone must win for himself his world-view. When the child passes beyond his pictorial views of life, and must enter the realm of ideas and duties, his faith is plunged at once into difficulties. He will come through into the light if we are not foolish to treat his questions as irreverent and his doubts as sin.

Youth is full of self-assertion. It is a swift revulsion from the dependence of childhood, and a raw experiment with unproved liberty. It is awkward and self-conscious because it has not found its true place in the social order. It is the age of swift, hot impulse, and longings for adventure, chivalry, and high enterprise. It is full of undefined ambitions, passionate in its comradeship, and unreserved in its hero-worship. To these qualities we must add features, ideal and gracious, which are the natural product of the Christian civilization in which our sons and daughters live. It is fashionable to condemn our Western civilization, but it is an infinite gain that our youths and maidens spend their critical years in a land of Bibles, Churches, and Schools. It is no empty boast to say that the finest idealism of youth is the creation of Christian

atmosphere and teaching. It is a reproach to us that we should have to discuss, "Why we cannot retain our elder scholars?" The trouble is with the stupidity of the churches rather than with some double-dose of original sin in our children. It is some fault in our presentation of the Gospel, some discrepancy in our embodiment of its ethics and grace, which is the cause of our depressing and persistent failure.

Adolescence is ready for the appeal of religion. Youth is eager to meet us half-way, and it is mentally and emotionally ripe for Conversion. Dr. G. Steven tells us,¹ "That as the body develops and varies so do the percentages of conversions; that the great bulk of them happen between the ages of ten and twenty, and that from that period the decline is rapid, until beyond thirty (or as some say, forty) there are practically none at all." Starbuck is confident that² "Conversion is a distinctively adolescent phenomenon."

We yield to no despair about the men and women over forty. Evangelism wins many a triumph in these later years, but it is evident that our great opportunity is with youth and maid. Why do we so often fail? It may be that we have missed the moral moods of youth. It is consciously imperfect; it fears failure, and knows the peril of its self. Apparent self-conceit is often only a pathetic device to hide this lurking dread. It feels the impact of temptation; its conscience is in arms

¹ "The Psychology of the Christian Soul," p. 170.

² "The Psychology of Religion," p. 28.

against sins of thought and desire, if not of actual deed. It clings to life with desperate ardour, and views death with a blinding terror, from which we are delivered in later years. It loathes monotony and longs for great adventure. These facts make clear an avenue for our approach to the soul of youth. We call to the ideal life. We pledge victory in energies of divine love. We assert that humility and surrender are the way to truest coronation. We offer not mere forgiveness for sin, but utmost victory over its power. We declare a life that conquers death, and we summon the adolescent to the most daring and glorious enterprise, that of winning the world to light and love. This thrilling message centres in the work of Christ, and offers to every Convert the seal of the Cross. To this appeal youth will respond in every generation, and in the fulness of its obedience will become the leader, prophet, and saviour of each succeeding century. When youth has lost its soul we may despair, but not till then.

We are ready to look upon the soul as it has risen into the self-consciousness of mature life. It has passed through the dreamland of childhood, it has emerged from the fiery unsettlement of youth, and now it stands face to face with the realities of a world in which it must win its crown or sink into the shame and slavery of final defeat. It has acquired great powers in which it may exult, but without surrender to a diviner impulse these very powers will seal its doom. We must know in some way, however elementary, the faculties of the soul,

if we are to estimate its answer to the converting summons. Some of these powers we have found enshrined in personality, but other functions cannot be ignored if we would understand the soul. We need not linger over the elementary physical senses, they are rooted in the body, and in any case will obey the authority of the soul. The body is not ignored, still less is it to be slandered as essentially evil. It is wonderful, beautiful, sacred: God's great work and gift. It is the organ which the soul will use in its highest service. It may become a Temple of the Holy Ghost. We have no sympathy with the religion that would brand and mutilate and starve the body. Conversion cannot mean the immolation of the physical basis of personal life. The Incarnation should save us from such a cruel heresy. There is wise suggestion in the words of Dora Greenwell:¹ "The Spirit of God, even as the spirit of a man, works, and, as far as we yet understand the conditions of our being, lives only through the body which has been prepared for it. By things which we can see and hear, by things which our hands can handle, by words and forms, by doctrines and institutions men live, and in them is the life of man. For it is neither by that which is merely natural, nor by that which is purely spiritual that man's complex nature is nourished and sustained. He lives neither by bread alone, nor yet upon angels' food, but upon that in which the properties of each are included." To reverence the soul requires no contempt for the body.

¹ "The Patience of Hope," pp. 70, 71.

The Power of Reason is most impressive. It lifts man above all other forms of life as we know them. It is the secret of human progress, and makes our history much more than the record of an instinctive evolution. It is the faculty by which we recognize facts, give them relation, proportion, and sequence, that out of them may be created systems of knowledge. It is the power to receive impressions, weld them into an ordered experience, and thereby accept a faith and create a morality: It is the faculty of comparison, and gives to phenomena light, shade, size, distance, and perspective; so it is the author of mathematics, art, architecture, and saves us from being crushed by a materialism that has no shape or message. It relates means to ends, and seeks the link between cause and effect. It has discovered for us the laws of gravitation and crystallization. It is the parent of the great sciences which steady us in the conviction that this is an ordered world. It is strength for achievement, for it assures the labourer of his reward, the scholar of his prize, if he is obedient to the great laws of the world. It saves us from the terror of chaos, and from the imprisonment of an unmeaning necessity. No Gospel of Conversion is more than vanity if it traduces the royalty and glory of reason.

It has mighty relationships to Religion. Soon or late it is forced to ask: Why this sequence? Why this relation between cause and effect? Why this world at all? and why am I in it? Here mere intellection breaks down at a barrier which seems

impassable, but faith does open a way, and it puts in our hands a torch which sheds light on even the unanswerable. Reason does come through law to the Supreme Intelligence which is the one Law-Maker. Determinism may be valid in the natural realm, but to anchor the mind on a "fortuitous concourse of atoms," or the fermentation of fluids, is wildest folly. The scholar who lets his mind have free and normal play will find his need of the Deity. Deism will not meet all his requirements, but it is a great preparation for that Evangel of Divine Fatherhood which calls us to Conversion.

It is time we abandoned the old feud between Reason and Faith. There never was as much conflict as bigotry and scepticism have supposed. They are not contradictory but supplementary. The last word is not with Reason, but it is a great word, and we are blind when we deny its due authority that we may sweep men impulsively into the fact of Conversion. The final word is with what Prof. W. James calls our impulsive, spontaneous beliefs, the great dumb intuitions which spring from the hidden depths of personality, and lead a writer to say: "I have the sense of a presence, strong and at the same time soothing, which hovers over me. Sometimes it seems to enwrap me with sustaining arms." That is faith, mystic and wonderful. It may refuse to chop logic and give definitions, but in reality it is not irrational. It is experimental, and deals with facts of which reason grows more ready to take heed. Stalker is brave

enough to affirm that¹ "God might almost be said to be a product of the reason ; at all events He is its discovery."

Reason is lifted above mere mechanism by soul force. Some see in it nothing but a movement of grey, brain matter, an agitation of ganglionic nerve centres, of which thought is but a secretion. They identify reason with brain, and locate it in certain lobes. This is a materialism run mad. It is to credit the piano with music and forget the player on the keyboard. It is to honour the engine and despise the engineer. Behind the brain, perhaps within it, there is the soul which selects the facts that shall be studied, merges impressions into knowledge, and makes divisions which the brain registers and then transmits to an obedient body. It is not even proved that there cannot be thought without brain-cells, but it is certain there can be no judgment without soul. It is there Conversion would lodge its great appeal.

To Reason God has given the light of Revelation. He has declared to us in His word and in Christ His relation to us and our duty to Him. Here Reason must obey, but it need not be enslaved, and we must pay it homage if we are to be saved from the morbid sentimentalism and loud sensationalism which are grave weaknesses in much modern religion. We must submit to the truth, but let it be claimed in reverence that the truth has a duty to the human mind which it dare not neglect, or it would fling our world into moral chaos. An

¹ "Christian Psychology," p. 181.

argument is not so impressive as a prayer, but even prayer is not improved by being unintelligent. In our wildest enthusiasms we must not forget that the mind has a high place in faith, and ¹“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do His commandments.”

Imagination is a great soul-power. It stands apart from Reason but is not alien. It adds to Reason an element that is of real value to the soul. It adds to realism a mystic quality, and it introduces us to experiences that are not a make-believe though they go beyond definite and logical statement. It is not untameable, and is subject to laws which psychology studies with real ardour. It is subject to the restraints which make a deaf man unable to imagine sound, or a blind man to realize colour, but it does add meaning and beauty to the actual. It inspires ambition, lifts labour above drudgery, fills sacrifice with song and suffering with rapture. It finds the angel in the child, and sees in the beloved unfading charm when all sexual attraction has passed away. It is wings for the soul, and lifts it to the upper air where reason cannot follow. It inspires effort, and gives it joy as nothing else can. Our buildings, railways, ships, paintings, and all the material and artistic achievements of civilization, existed in imagination before they were realized in actual form. They were dreams before they were deeds, and out of the shadows they have beckoned men

¹ Psalm cxi. 10.

to the most substantial prodigies of genius and labour. It is our silent mastery of things, and it is the wondrous faculty by which seer and poet look beneath or rise above mere phenomena to the eternal realities. If we could suppose a world out of which imagination had vanished, we should see a dead world, and see a paralysed humanity, prostrate amid its grey ashes. Our very dreams refuse to let us forget the spaces, peopled and real, which are far beyond the deductions of reason or the utterance of common speech.

This power has its place in religion when in Conversion the soul is turned towards God. No dogmatic orthodoxy should crush imagination, or imprison what Amiel calls "reverie," for it is this power that is at home in worship. It realizes easily the light that never shone on land or sea. It puts us in the way of the Apocalypse, and makes us citizens of celestial cities. It may run into excesses of hysteria. It may invite self-deception, and expose life to the morbid and unclean. Alas ! it must be confessed that too easily imagination inflames lust. This power, in spite of all its perils, must never be crushed, for to it the Gospel can make its vivid appeal and find a swift response.

We must guard ourselves against any mechanical account of this radiant faculty. Materialism would imprison it as it would Reason. Imagination is vastly more than gland, or nerve, or inflammation, or indigestion. It is a vast picture gallery which lies behind and within the Soul, who is the great artist. Unwittingly, it may translate into conscious-

ness, whether sleeping or awake, the thoughts of God, who is the Supreme Artist, the Eternal Fount of all idealism and beauty. To this power our Gospel is addressed, for it will give the truest interpretation of the parables of Jesus and the visions of the saints. It will add force to moral rebuke, for it will set ablaze the admonitions of conscience, and it will enforce the penalties of sin with a lurid intensity which no evangelical orthodoxy can equal. It needs imagination to interpret the Day of Judgment, and still more to grasp the message of the Cross. The great day will have come when¹ "The old men shall dream dreams, and the young men see visions."

Imagination does much to make immortality real to our congregations. We owe to it the "Vision" of Dante, and "Paradise Lost" by Milton. Both are colossal efforts of imagination to realize the hereafter, and both are supreme examples of the imperative urge of the soul to pierce the shadows beyond death. It is said that Heaven and Hell do not appeal to men as they once did. It is true that the material representations, common a generation ago, have lost their power, but we still draw mighty motives from the Great Beyond, and the soul of man is won for faith because of its declaration of immortality more than by any other fact. It is the "hope," as the New Testament calls it, which reaches forth to the millennium, for it impels Peter to say:² "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,

¹ Joel ii. 28.

² 2 Peter iii. 13.

wherein dwelleth righteousness." This hope is more than a dream, it is a dynamic, for John says :¹ "Everyone that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

The child never dies out of men, and the soul retains its wistful wonder. To it Conversion comes with its story of a moral Armageddon and its celestial victory. Evangelists dare not confine themselves to cold intellection. Theologians will find precision of statement insufficient. The flora of imagination is rich about the Tree of Life in the Garden of the Lord. The witchery of love is as true as the imperative of law. Religion needs her poets if she is to win the souls of men for Grace and Truth.

Memory has a great place in the equipment of the Soul. It is the power by which impression, experience, and conviction are safely stored in the treasury of life. Augustine pays it eloquent tribute:² "Great is this force of memory, excessive great, O my God; a large and boundless chamber! who ever sounded the bottom thereof? Men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by."

Memory works through cunning laws of association. It links facts like beads upon mental processes, never fully understood. It has a strange power of selection, and at will can call up the recollections that give pleasure, inspire motive, or

¹ 1 John iii. 3. ² "The Confessions," Book X.

enforce duty. It has order and method, and is not a mere scrap-heap. It stores with care, and indexes with skill. It is not a thing like a photographic plate, it is a power. It can be developed, trained and disciplined, and made to serve purposes higher than mere recollection. It bolts knowledge into unity, and without it we should possess nothing more than the immediate sensation of the passing moment. It gives permanence to art, long life to literature, and preserves our Gospel from age to age.

It is not mechanical, and the materialism which fails to interpret reason and imagination is just as helpless before the marvels of memory. It would be as rational to reverence the pigments and canvas of the picture and ignore the artist, as regard memory as independent of the Soul, which really commands it.

Memory is responsive to religion. It reminds us of the moral order. We can never forget the havoc of sin and the victories of grace. It preserves to us the biographies of the saints, the story of worship, and the word of our Lord. Conversion could make no appeal to men deprived of memory. It burns in upon us the sense of guilt, and reminds us of the sins of hot swift moments we had thought forgotten. It repeats to us the teaching of home, the hymns of Church and Sunday School, and the counsel of loving parents and teachers, and thus it moves us to penitence, confession, and surrender. It is more than a mental equipment. It is a great evangelical endowment, and our Lord realized its power when

He says, with sovereign pathos: "This do in remembrance of Me."

There is a memory of the Church which preserves for all the ages a "sacred deposit" of redeeming truth. We Protestants are quick to resent tradition. We resist what we call "the dead hand," but the immediate moment would be meagre and mean were it not for the memories of many yesterdays. Worship is most truly great when it preserves hallowed associations which have saved and enriched many generations. Preachers and Evangelists are most effective in Conversion when they stimulate recollection, and call up from the past spiritual incident and teaching, tragic fault and secret sin. Thus they evoke the confession of guilt, the mood of penitence, the surrender of faith, and the ecstasy of devotion. That is Conversion and the New Birth.

The Central and Sovereign power of the Soul is Will. Self-determinism is the royalty of life. Nature is governed by laws and forces of which it has no cognition, and which it can in no way control. The animals of field and air and sea, plants and planets develop and decay, are moved hither and thither, and there is no sign of volition. It is here that man is lord of Nature. He can harness and control its forces. He can make its laws serve his will till fires drive his engines, captured sunshine warms his home, and the lightnings are his messengers. He can stand apart and study this tremendous materialism, discover its processes, and wrest its secrets. In the moral realm the will is

the decisive factor. He can choose or spurn good or evil. He can will his own god, and he can resist pleadings that we regard as omnipotent. This is not the place for a discussion on "free-will" and how it can be reconciled with divine government, but when we have discussed till we are weary, the fact remains that our will is our own, and in some awful way God pays reverence to that will, and will not destroy it to produce a compulsory virtue. Man is greatest here, and any summons to Conversion must pay homage to this august human power. Any religion that would destroy the will is fatal, even when it would save, for it destroys that power of voluntary submission which is the truest fibre of the converted life. Better a resistance to be overcome than an automatic and involuntary virtue that has in it no element of choice.

The Evangelist appeals direct to the will. He will use many motives ; emotional, like fear, hope, or gratitude ; intellectual, like inference, comparison, and the thirst to know ; but his central purpose is to arrest the will, and by a redemptive paradox to secure its highest freedom through subjection. The will has a part to play in Conversion, indeed, if emphasis is laid on decision, then it is the supreme factor. It performs two functions : revulsion from evil and choice of goodness. For the Christian these activities centre in Jesus ; they are two-fold. First the will must make choice of Christ, and then it must surrender to Him, so that His word is final, His example is supreme, and His work is sufficient for all faith. This is "the will to believe." It is

more than intellectual or even conscientious. It is volitional, and has issues which can never be surpassed in human experience. Christianity has a great ministry to the emotions and intellect. It moulds conduct and inspires service, but first and last it flings itself upon the human will to dominate it and then declare its finest emancipation.

We must never seek an abrogation of the will, for that would involve the soul in a dull, useless, unmoral trance. There is no life in it, only unconscious twitching of the limbs. We urge the will to find itself by direction to higher ends and investment with nobler perceptions and powers. To be identified with the will of God, as seen in Christ, is the most complete surrender, and it is the largest, fullest freedom.

Even a brief study of the Soul fills one with wonder at its august powers. We speak of it with faltering words. We see that its needs are colossal, mystic, and vital. We are moved to the conclusion that its first requirement is a higher control, which shall fuse all its faculties into the beauties of holiness. However we may define goodness, we are all agreed that here is the only crown worthy of a human soul. Whatever may be the Law of Heaven, the structure, faculties, and possibilities of humanity demand sainthood for its completion. There can be imagined no other end sufficient for all the story of a human soul. We know no other way than Conversion to such an issue, for it places men willingly under a divine control and covenant. As W. Monod says, in his memories of Adolphe

Monod, man needs¹ "A real supernatural action, capable of giving thoughts and taking them away, by a God as truly Master of the heart as He is of the rest of Nature."

When the Soul finds God the Master it is converted, and the way is open to the brightening day that shall never set.

¹ Adolphe Monod, "I. Souvenirs," p. 433.

CHAPTER III.

Conviction of Sin.

THE awful fact and mystery of sin form the background of the message of Conversion.

It can neither be ignored nor denied. We feel its impulse, are shamed by its guilt, and shadowed by its terrors. We see it work ruin in the individual, darkening the reason, corrupting the body, and in a swift mood of passion wrecking the fair fabric of long and honoured years. It poisons family life, wrecks the home, making parenthood lascivious and childhood rebellious. We see it corrupt society, destroy its unity, and plunge all classes into hideous social war. It spreads among the nations, and destroys all ideals of goodwill, solidarity, and peace, till continents are drowned in blood and the seas are filled with piracy and murder.

It is not only the tragedy without of which we are conscious, it is a cancer within. We realize at the centre of life a moral taint, an evil bias which moves us to sin. We know it to be accursed, and yet, with malignant fascination, it holds us in tragic bondage. Behind the deed of sin there is a

morbid condition of soul. The act we might leave to the moralist, the result of the act we could leave to the reformer, but this perverted condition of mind and will is the problem of the Christian thinker, and its solution is the task of the Christian Church. We declare in Conversion the only remedy for sin. If we fail here, we fail everywhere. The essential need is not accuracy of statement, but redeeming power. Without that saving dynamic the Church has no message for the world.

It is not till the light of Christian revelation shines upon us that we truly realize the problem. Only the Christian man really perceives the actuality of sin. It is truth that makes error repulsive, the radiance of love which makes sin hideous, and the glory of Christ that makes the shame of Belial loathsome. It is as we view the Cross that we realize how desperate is our need. The blinding and glorious vision upon the highway moves the proudest of men to confess himself "the chief of sinners." It is easy to label as morbid and hysterical those who say in agony that they are convicted of sin. It is a real experience, and not a seclusive subjectivity. It is a proven fact that as men approach Christ, see the beauty of His life, the grace of His message, and the colossal sacrifice of His death, their consciousness of sin becomes a flaming reproach which no tears can relieve. This agony is found in the greatest literature. It is often too intense to be uttered. It is the sob of many a heart, and to-day, under most modern reserve, it is the anguish of commonplace men and

women. The psychologist attempts to explain it. The Evangel of Conversion alone can meet its prayer. It need not paralyse with despair, it may be the birth-pang of a new and better life.

Men are smitten with a sense of failure as they see ideal humanity in Christ, hear His call "Follow Me," and realize how far they fall short of the gleaming vision. Byron said, in one of his letters : "What fills me with despair is not the thought of what I am, but the thought of what I might have been." It is that ache of self-reproach that shadows men. The soul in the depths, called subconscious, does weave dreams of what life might be : pure, unselfish, heroic, and true. The dream bursts forth, is projected upon the conscience, and compels comparison between the actual and ideal. It is in that moment of judgment that the sense of failure becomes despair. Men are inclined to give up the struggle. They will make no further effort unless religion brings the promise of power. The moralist points the way. The law spells death through its ruthless judgment. The Evangelist will not palliate the failure or minimize the malady. The least trace of insincerity would be fatal. He will declare the worst, but he will promise the best. Men will still confess there is no soundness or hope in them, but they will be nerved to expect one who is "mighty to save." Attempts at self-control and reform will have our sympathy and inspire our admiration, but they will not win our confidence. We would help all public enterprise that would make it difficult to do wrong and easy to do

right, but our final faith is not here. Humanity is in ruins; its failure is a terrific and hopeless tragedy unless some diviner power comes to its rescue. Conversion is the realization of this higher help.

This fact of failure may beget a pessimism that doubts the existence of the ideal. This dreary mood is as old as human thought. The classic sayings are often quoted. "Best of all for all things upon earth is it not to be born, nor to behold the splendours of the sun. Next best to traverse as soon as possible the gates of Hades." "For death we are all cherished, and fattened like a herd of hogs that is wantonly butchered." Such pessimism is a pitiful surrender to a cruel fate. It has no elasticity and buoyancy in it. It made suicide reasonable and infanticide common in the ancient world. Humanity has only survived because the Gospel of Conversion has breathed hope into the world, though many are but partially conscious of its gentle imperative. It is a great gain that our common thought regards despair as cowardice. That gain is the gift of the Christian faith. Nothing can be more awful than the confessions of Tolstoy. They are most lurid when we remember that he was rich, honoured, and beloved by wife and children, yet he says:¹ "Behold me, then, a man happy and in good health, hiding the rope in order not to hang myself to the rafters of the room where every night I went to sleep alone; behold me no longer going shooting, lest I should yield to

¹ "My Confession."

the too easy temptation of putting an end to myself with my gun. I did not know what I wanted. I was afraid of life. I was driven to leave it."

This pessimism is saved from the utter despair of the classic age, because there had dawned upon men the Christian message, and its appeal lay away down in his hidden heart. He says again:¹ "During the whole course of this year, when I almost unceasingly kept asking myself how to end the business, whether by rope or bullet, during all that time, alongside of all those movements of my ideas and observations, my heart kept languishing with another pining emotion. I can call this by no other name than that of a thirst for God. This craving for God had nothing to do with the movement of my ideas—in fact, it was the direct contrary of that movement—but it came from my heart."

Tolstoy is great in his despair, but he lives in history and literature because within his deepest soul there was a cry for God that would not be silenced. It is to that thirst for God that Conversion brings its good tidings.

Bunyan illustrates the same agony, but it is distinctive from that of Tolstoy in that it is more Christian. The titled landowner thirsts for the Deity, the tinker's son would find the Saviour. The story of his grief will never be forgotten.² "Now, thought I, I grow worse and worse; now I am farther from Conversion than ever I was

¹ "My Confession."

² "Grace Abounding."

before. If now I should have been burned at the stake, I could not believe that Christ had love for me. Alas, I could neither hear Him, nor see Him, nor feel Him, nor savour any of His things. Sometimes I would tell my conditions to the people of God, which, when they heard, they would pity me, and would tell of the promises, but they had as good have told that I must reach the sun with my fingers as have bidden me receive or rely upon the Promise. . . . I would have changed heart with anybody. I thought none but the devil himself could equal me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind. . . . I was both a burden and a terror to myself, nor did I ever so know, as now, what it was to be weary of my life, and yet afraid to die. How gladly would I have been anything but myself ! Anything but a man, and in any condition but my own ! ”

We may be thankful that Bunyan's despair was puritan and not pagan, for out of that saving quality has come a literature which has enriched and illumined the world.

These confessions sound remote to modern ears, but they are genuine experiences to many who await the call to Conversion. One day there came to my study a youth begotten of good parents. He had considerable natural gifts, and as a ship's officer had had wide and varied experiences. He was in the depths of despair ; confessed he was the loathsome victim of secret sin. He hated his own body, the instrument of his shame. He wanted to die, and would have put an end to life if he could

have felt sure that it was really the end. The teaching of his parents was a torturing memory. His early ideals were a nightmare. His failure was an agony without hope. He loathed his life. He was afraid to die. He spoke with that reserve which is native to a modern decently-educated youth, but he really wished to be assured that immortality was conditional, and suicide would really end all. His lament was a modern echo of Tolstoy, Bunyan, and many others. It was conviction of sin, and I shudder to think of what would have been the result of our interview if I could not have declared the summons to Conversion, and promised a gift of power that can do all things. We are mistaken and blind when we suppose that this tragic consciousness has passed out of life. It speaks with the accent of to-day. It does not speak easily, because reserve has become the habit of social decency, but it remains at the heart of life, a bitter woe which only the Gospel of Grace can relieve.

The pessimism may inflame into panic. We pass by for the moment the dread of penalty and hell. We resent the materialistic conceptions of punishment, and forget that they are blundering attempts to put into words the unutterable woe that must follow sin. That woe is not the declaration of creeds, it is the pronouncement of conscience. There is another panic, more subtle, and just as terrible. It is a horrible fear of existence, an abysmal sense of loneliness begotten out of discord with every law of beauty and grace. Prof. W.

James quotes the case of a French scholar who confessed this awful terror of life. He was afraid of the dark, imagined horrors in every shadow. Even the sunshine gave him little comfort ; to quote his own words :¹ " This fear was so invasive and powerful that if I had not clung to Scripture-texts, like ' The eternal God is my refuge,' ' Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,' I think I should have grown really insane." There can be nothing more dreadful than this unreasoning fear of life. The days are a reproach, and the nights are a terror. We should abandon every task and surrender all our faith if we were not confident that to extremest need there can come fullest power. We have no need to revive the old cruel declaration of the doom of sin. By its very success the Church is forced to lay aside its old weapons of terror. We can never dare to weaken in our perception of the wickedness of sin, the certainty of its doom, and the swift urgency with which men should flee from " the wrath to come." At the same time we have a Gospel of reconciliation and peace. The love of God that passeth knowledge can alone save men from the fear that worketh death.

Sin is the great discord of life. It involves the tragedy of the divided soul. In Pauline speech it is endless strife between the spirit and the flesh. It is war for the throne of personality, and there can be no truce while the victory is long delayed. The Evangelist sees here the promptings of original

¹ " Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 161.

sin, or temptations of the devil. The psychologist speaks of the subconscious soul seeking to dominate the life of phenomenon, incident, and conscious experience, that they may obey the deeper motivations which are hidden beneath all definition, and are ultimately the supreme factors in character. The Methodist uses his own language to describe this war for man's soul, and the speech of many a Class Meeting is quite as true as the proudest conclusions of the Academy. This dark struggle is stated with graphic force by the apostle in his cry :¹ "O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me from this body of death ?" It is not morbid or unnatural. It is the bitter experience of man as he would rise to the highest and best and feels against him all the drag of lust and appetite. The psychologist would say it is the effort to make the noble ideal "the habitual centre of one's personal energy." He means the same thing, a persistent and pitiless struggle of the higher and lower self. Because the baser self seems more substantial and immediate it often prevails, and its victory is the agony and shame of the soul. Augustine writes with his heart's blood :² "So these two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, the other spiritual, contended with each other and disturbed my soul. . . . With what lashes of words did I not scourge my soul. Yet it shrank back, it refused, though it had no excuse to offer. . . . I said within myself, 'Come, let it be done now.' And, as I said it, I was on the point of the resolve. I all but did

¹ Romans vii. 24.² "Confessions," Book VIII.

it, yet I did not do it. And I made another effort, and almost succeeded, yet I did not reach it, and did not grasp it, hesitating to die to death and live to life, and the evil to which I was so wonted held me more than the better life I had not tried."

The words seem involved; they are an attempt to put into speech a struggle which in its awful intensity is unutterable. Some years ago a man described to me his tremendous war with the craving for alcohol. He hated it as his ruin. He reached the point of physical repulsion from its taste, and yet he was betrayed again and again from within. The divided soul was his curse. He resolved upon abstinence, and yet within an hour he drank so madly, "that," said he, "I should have drunk the liquor if I had seen the flames of hell through the glass." The unity of life is broken, and its music has crashed into cruel discord.

The lower self is strong in two ways. There is inertia of will which resents disturbance. It prefers to yield to the immediate and pleasurable, and drift with the smoother currents. It resents the task of self-enquiry and judgment. It fears the verdict of conscience and the testing of a high ideal. It is content with the call to ease, gain, and self-indulgence, and regards all impulse to self-mastery and denial as a cruel intrusion. Psychology says the same thing: "The highest wishes lack just that last acuteness, that touch of explosive intensity which can quell the lower tendencies for ever." It

is this dead weight we have to lift, and it is no easy task.

There is the bias of passion. It is the neutrality of ease deepened into the anger of revolt. Pride, gain, and many lusts promise more than mere gratification. They profess to enlarge freedom and win more space for the Ego. It is this quality of sin that thinks purity chill and negative, and hails passion as positive and aggressive. The lusts of life are loud-voiced and gaily-clad, and they have initial advantages in their struggle with meekness and chastity.

Some are hindered in the struggle by a vicious ancestry and a poisoned birth. They were never normal, and to the glamour of unknown and alluring evil there is added a bias which makes heredity such a cruel burden in many cases. They are beaten and broken from the beginning, and it need cause no wonder if their defeat begets despair. They are not allowed to sink without a struggle, for there is some buoyancy in the soul, some vitality in the conscience that compels them to make a fight against their awful fate. Whatever be the pathway of the soul it must move through battle. Its way is through tears and blood, and there is no escape from the ordeal.

The word of Conversion is addressed to this fact of conflict. It does not promise immunity from struggle, it offers no sluggish and sentimental ease, but it does declare a power that makes victory sure. It identifies God with this war of the soul, and to the converted man it pledges divine energies. It

is the only message that can save from utmost despair. It transforms defeat into triumph, for it is the "power of God unto salvation."

The Soul is smitten with the shame of Bondage. As man moves from childhood to maturity there develops the instinct of self-assertion and the desire to possess. The two together claim to judge as to that which is desirable, and naturally prefer dainty ease, immediate pleasure, and sensuous gratification. At once the soul is in peril of temptation, and the passive choice becomes an active passion. Evil suggestion falls like seed upon the ground ready to receive it. Thomas à Kempis is a true historian when he says:¹ "At the first there comes to the mind simply a thought, then strong imagination, after that a feeling of pleasure, then an evil motion, then consent, and so by degrees the malignant enemy gains full possession." With all our investigations we have not improved upon the account of Genesis as to the origin of sin:² "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit and did eat."

Temptation is a suggestion, a crisis, and calls into active consciousness the formless impulse to know and possess. It is a conflict, for in all men there is a higher self which refuses to submit without a struggle to the alluring suggestions of evil. It is here that conscience comes to our aid, and it calls up impressions which give battle to the seductions

¹ "The Imitation of Christ," I., XIII. ² Genesis iii. 6.

of temptation. If we are asked the origin of temptation it will provoke in some quarters a smile to speak of the devil. There are, however, problems in evil and its temptings which are not solved apart from the supposition that there is a malignant evil which seeks our ruin, and many of its activities suggest personality. The issue of the temptation is decided by that which holds most firmly our attention, which, in psychological phrase, passes from the margin to the centre of cognition and volition. Dr. G. Steven shows how temptation becomes sin by its power to arrest attention :¹ "If we look at the evil, fixing our attention on it for a moment, our imagination begins to play on it : we see ourselves realizing and enjoying the pleasure it promises. From the subconscious rise up perhaps the faces of old companions who had been with us in a like sin before. We are in the old scene again : the old desire is on us, and swift as was the choice itself, the old deed is done." He goes on to say : "In the later stage of the temptation the only possible hope of escape from actual sinning must come to us from without—a sudden movement that calls off the attention, or something that startles us in the very approach to the act."

Sin, like any other deed, tends to repeat itself. Temptation victorious grows more powerful and aggressive, while the power of resistance declines until the suggestion becomes a tyranny and the sin a bondage. There can be no worse form of

¹ "The Psychology of the Christian Soul," p. 120.

slavery. Moralists made admirable suggestions for our rescue, but they forget too often that when sin is master it possesses the heart, corrupting its founts, till uncleanness becomes no longer a temptation from without, but an uprising from within. It is so relentless in its grip upon life that it scorns rebuke, rejects the light, and crucifies love. The moralist is helpless before such accursed bondage. Here above all is needed some liberating power from without and above. Here Conversion brings its message of emancipation.

The Gospel meets temptation with suggestions of light. It challenges sin with great thoughts of daring, devotion, and self-sacrifice. It burns in upon men the stupendous conception of the Deity, clothed with eternal righteousness and omnipotent love. Once fill the thought with God and temptation may be defied when it would fill our attention and inflame our imagination. New interests and affections fill the soul. The subconscious self is reinforced to win its own freedom. The Evangelist and the Psychologist agree though they know it not.

In many the habit of sin has become abject and hopeless slavery. When that point is reached no appeal or reason or idea of reform can move the will or break the bonds. A moral insanity follows passion till no reason of interest or gain can explain the madness of sin. Men will fling away repute, health, and all good things for the lust of a moment. Women will shame husband and child, sacrifice home and honour, sell their very bodies for drink

and drugs. Argument and appeal, prohibition and penalty, are of no avail. The soul is beyond all resistance ; it is bound to beastliness. It weeps ; it even tries to pray, but it is swept on to doom and death. It is literally true to say it is taken captive by the devil. It is obsessed by sin. The craving of the body becomes slavery of the mind. Liberty, man's glorious prerogative, becomes the instrument of his ruin. The soul, born to be a son of the eternal, becomes the slave of the animal. The reason and conscience are outraged, and in some cases abandon to despair and death the slave of sin.

John Wesley describes this awful bondage in terms that are terribly true. " The more he strives, wishes, labours to be free, the more does he feel his chains, the grievous chains of sin, wherewith Satan binds and leads him captive at his will. . . . Thus he toils without end, repenting and sinning, and repenting and sinning again till at length the poor, sinful, helpless wretch is even at his wits' end, and can barely groan : ' O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ' "

To these slaves of sin Conversion must bring the vision of the Great Liberator. Christ alone meets this cry of the soul. He is not only ineffable in love : He is might : in Him is the will to conquer ; His is the majesty of final Empire ; He is the Captain of salvation. Sin is not merely forgiven by Him, it is smitten and overcome. In Him captivity is taken captive, and as multitudes of enslaved men

and women have seen Him, they have sung with joy :

“ My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

He is the colossal Personality who breaks the spell of evil. He fires ambitions that overcome the seductions of pleasure and gain. He inspires new affections which, surging from within, burst all bonds. He is the Saviour, and in His finished work our Salvation is accomplished. No other Evangel than this can meet the need of the soul conscious of the bondage of sin. This message is our commission ; we must declare it with the boldest faith.

The Soul is Sick unto death. Starbuck goes far in his effort to represent sin as a disease or depression of the soul. He speaks of¹ “restlessness, hopelessness, sadness, and anxiety.” Much of this has to do with physical reactions that follow sin. Prof. W. James has a learned section in his great book on “The Sick Soul,” in which he lays emphasis on melancholia and fear. Much of what he says applies to the nerve rather than the soul. It is neurasthenia more than sin. Both are right when they lay emphasis on the disability and pain that follow sin. It is at once a leprosy and a paralysis, and our Lord, by many of His miracles, forces this view upon us. It withers the hand that should serve ; it blinds the eye and deafens the ear which should receive revelations from God ; it cripples

¹ “The Psychology of Religion,” p. 71.

the feet which should be swift in errands of mercy, and it is the waste of the very blood of the soul. Its end is death and decay as well as judgment. When sin has proved itself the power of disease, the soul is "dead in trespasses and sin."

The realization of this fatal malady is a feature of Conviction of Sin. Self is poisoned into loathsomeness, and the language of many a soul is full of the shudder of self-contempt. It is hard to escape the instinctive thought that there is some reproach in disease. In the moral realm our instinct is true and righteous judgment. To many men religion is little more than an ambulance picking up the diseased and wounded. It does that, but it does vastly more, for it is a pillar of fire leading to victory.

Prof. J. Royce has shown us psychologically the inner meaning of Bunyan's "Grace Abounding." He tells how¹ the childhood of the dreamer was morbid and sensitive, nervously unhealthy. Then he is plunged into a long and bitter struggle in which he was fated to be beaten. The devil triumphed, but in his victory he "dug his own grave," for while his victim was desperate he came to himself. The hot pangs of remorse and pain which drove him to say, "Down fall I as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree into great guilt and fearful despair." That same despair impelled him to throw himself in utter submission upon the mercy of God, and he tells us: "Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from

¹ "Psychological Review," Vol. I.

my afflictions and irons, my temptations also fled away. . . . Now went I also home, rejoicing for the Grace and Love of God."

The story is still enacted in lives about us when the pangs of sin are hot and swift. When the disease of sin becomes loathsome and intolerable to us, then are we ready for the word of Conversion. The condition we dread most is that of cynical contentment with evil, or proud unconsciousness of its ruin. To the diseased soul Conversion offers healing, vitality, and joy. Soundness of life is quite as evangelical as forgiveness of sin. A few years ago "The British Weekly" did us good service by gathering in its columns testimonies of Conversion. They all had the one feature of the joy of life. A few quotations will show this: "The greatest joy in my life has been the promise of a Saviour, who knoweth our infirmity, and was in all things tempted like as we are, yet without sin, and whose strength is made perfect in our weakness."

"Some hours spent by the Victoria Falls on the Zambesi, when a great and wonderful revelation of God flooded my soul. The message that the mighty falls had for me caused me to thank God for the great gift of Life, with its unimaginable and infinite possibilities."

In the anguish of Conviction of Sin the soul cries :

" Ah ! whither should I go,
Burdened, and sick and faint ?
To whom should I my troubles show,
And pour out my complaint ? "

The quest of the Sick Soul must be directed to the Great Physician. The Gospel of the Balm of Gilead must be proclaimed, then shall we know the joy that led John Masefield to sing :¹

“ O glory of the lighted mind,
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind,
The station brook, to my new eyes,
Was babbling out of Paradise ;
The waters rushing from the rain
Were singing Christ has risen again.
I thought all earthly creatures knelt
From rapture of the joy I felt.
The narrow station-wall's brick ledge,
The wild hop withering in the hedge,
The lights in huntsman's upper storey
Were parts of an eternal glory,
Were God's eternal garden flowers ;
I stood in bliss at this for hours.”

Such a Vision floods the saddest, sickest soul with energies that never tire, and a buoyant youth that fears no decay. It triumphs over physical conditions, and makes even the afflicted body beautiful with a vitality that is inward and spiritual.

The Soul, when convicted of Sin, is crushed under the shame of personal guilt.

Sin is not an abstraction, an idea outside of self ; it is our own deed. It is not an experience that has come to us. It is our evil choice carried into evil act. It is a crime which we have committed against Love and Righteousness. It is our very own, and no general theory or discussion can evade the personal guilt which covers us with scarlet shame. We have chosen wrong. It is not the weight of custom, or habit of society, or native

¹ “ The Everlasting Mercy.”

instinct which is guilty, but the self which has resisted all appeals of blessing and rebuke, forgiveness and warning, love and judgment, and wilfully chosen sin. This is the deepest agony of Conviction of Sin, and no philosophy can relieve us of this consciousness of guilt. We are surrounded by mock comforters, who tell us that we are the victims of necessity. We are both in good and evil creatures of forces beyond our will. We are totals of heredity, or net results of contending social influences. This feeling of guilt is a morbid delusion, and the falling stone might just as well reproach itself when it breaks the glass upon which it falls by the law of gravitation. All this learned disputation avails nothing. We are inveterate in our conclusion that our will is our own, and the guilt connected with our sin is not a general conclusion, it is a personal shame. The verdict of conscience is inevitable and indestructible.

We know too that we are responsible for the consequences of our sin. We see them travel out from self into the vast spaces of being and relation, carrying evil wherever they move, and the fault is our own. There are allowances to be made for us, and God will give them full reckoning, but conscience refuses us any relief in them. We see how our sin corrupts self with pessimism, bondage, and disease. Spiritual death is never other than voluntary suicide. We see sin move upon our kindred till the home is wrecked. It curses the children till they are polluted by their father's sin. We eat

sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. We see sin extend its malignant influence till Heaven is shadowed, the will of God is denied, and His Love is crucified. The sin that does this hideous havoc is our own. Love would make excuses for us. Courtesy would minimize our shame, but we can make no excuse for self. Guilt is the terrific fact that fills Conviction with anguish. We are driven to confession when we face the most august fact of history :

“ My conscience felt and owned the guilt,
And filled me with despair ;
'Twas for my sins His blood was spilt,
For them He suffered there.”

It is guilt that drives men to remorse that has no hope, and to despair that would welcome death if only it was the final end ; but there is the Judgment to come. It is not an item in a creed. It is the sure and certain culmination of our guilt. Grim terror follows guilt as men are told by conscience.

“ Dread alarms shall shake the proud,
Pale amazement, restless fear,
And, amid the thunder-cloud,
Shall the Judge of men appear.”

It is to this tragedy that Conversion comes with its message of forgiveness. and the New Birth. Even here guilt demands that its new hope shall vindicate the law, establish righteousness, and in some way bring sin to judgment and penalty. This demand is met alone in the finished work of Christ. He is the Source of Hope, the Liberator

and the Physician, but above all He is the Saviour. He has borne our sins in His own body. He has suffered in our stead. He has established in His own pangs and blood the sovereignty of right, and in His Cross He has made it possible that our guilt shall melt into the promise and joy of justification and reconciliation. A religion, without the Cross, has no hope for guilt. It has no redemption for the man covered with shame and smitten with remorse. We are thrice blessed in our message of redemption, and we must allow no gracious theories to weaken our grip of the saving truth :¹ "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed."

Conviction of Sin is viewed by many in these days as unwholesome and mistaken. The description given in this chapter is regarded as old-fashioned. Theodore Parker admires the classics, because in them "there was no consciousness of sin." Jollity is sound philosophy, and even a debauch is not altogether wicked if it drives dull care away. Christian Science doubts the reality of sin, and would rid us of its terrors by readings which are more like a hypnotic incantation than a moral revelation. Some proclaim optimism as the ideal message for men. They shrink from all thought of repentance, confession, and judgment. It is a genial blindness which is not to be envied, for its unconsciousness of peril must, soon or late,

¹ 1 Peter ii. 24.

have a rude awakening. Some take refuge in what is called "natural religion." Nature is enough for them, and as long as they are natural they are content, and refuse to acknowledge sin. They are frankly pagan, and regard all this trouble of soul, with its sorrow for sin, and yearning for God, as neurotic. They offer the convicted sinner the beauties of land and sea, and in some cases, advise, the crude moralities of the farmyard. Much of this is mere bravado, as when one says: "What is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect." It is whistling to keep up one's courage, for sooner or later, the tragic realities of life press in upon us and refuse to be ignored. It is vain to quote the lines of Walt Whitman, for it robs life of glory as well as tragedy, and it has no higher vision for humanity than sleek contentment chewing its cud in a sunlit field.¹

"I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained,
I stand and look at them long and long,
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins.
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania
of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands
of years ago.
Not one is respected, or unhappy over the whole earth."

Such a conception robs the soul of its truest splendours. Better suffer and bleed and fail to try again in the battle with sin. The victory is worth all the cost.

¹ "Song of myself," 32.

Some writers carry the boldest theories of natural evolution into religion. Sin, therefore, is an incident in development ; it is the loss of the individual that the species may gain. There has been no Fall ; at the worst, it is a temporary reversion which Nature will repair. Sin is part of the quest for fuller self-consciousness. It may blunder here and there, but to put on tragic airs of repentance and anguish is to make much ado about nothing. This is to abstract all personal guilt from sin, but it is also to rob all greatness from personal virtue. It is a subtle heresy, which impoverishes the redeeming Cross, and thereby takes the great urge out of the call to Conversion.

While some teachers do not refuse to admit the reality and gravity of sin, they bid the sinner to brace his nerve and will and set himself upon his own recovery. We are told there is no need for the atonement and the aid of the supernatural. We must be ethical rather than evangelical. Men need the bracing summons to effort and discipline, and not the sentimental message to rely upon a divine grace. The rallying ethical note is needed, but it is not enough. To act as though sin is merely a blunder we can rectify, or a failure we can repair, is to deny the most vital and tremendous experience of life. Starbuck says : " We should think that a million of years hence, equity, justice, and mental and physical good order will be so fixed and organized that no one will have any idea of evil or sin." The imperative question to be answered will not wait a million years for the answer.

The agonies involved in Conviction of Sin are realities in life, but they need not sink us in despair. Conversion is just as real. We hold the Evangelical faith that sin confessed can be forgiven, its guilt atoned, its bondage broken, and its power destroyed. Heaviness can be turned into joy, fear into trust, and death into life. This miracle is being performed every hour of every day. Sin is being crucified in redeemed lives. Christ is being welcomed and enthroned. Conversion is not a tradition, it is the task and triumph of to-day.

We are told that under modern conditions Conviction of Sin has become rather a conviction to righteousness. The future ideal appeals to the soul more than the shame of the past. Therefore, it is said, the lurid judgments of the old preachers are out of date. Hope, rather than judgment, must be our message. Surely it is the vision of the ideal unreached that saddens men with failure, and brings in its train all the woes of Conviction of Sin. No picture of unattained blessedness is enough. Conscience refuses to be befooled, and there will always be needed the saving anguish of contrition and confession. The Cross is a great surgery as much as an infinite compassion. No essay on health can relieve the cancer which poisons the soul. It must be cut out, and the former evangelists were wise when they forced men to realize the shame and horror of sin. The time for consolation only comes when the conscience brushes aside all evasion and excuse, and cries: "God be merciful to me a sinner." All must tread the shadowed road to

reach the light, and for most it still remains the way of tears. As the dream of goodness grows more vivid, so will the reality of sin grow more loathsome. In conviction is the travail of the new life which Conversion can claim.

PART III.

VARIETIES OF CONVERSION.

CHAPTER I.

Conversion in Crisis.

CONVERSION assumes many forms. Their classification is not easy, for they shade one into the other according to varieties of temperament and condition. There is always the peril of insistence upon some one mode of Conversion, which leads to mechanical views of religion, or sours into a bigotry which becomes a betrayal of spiritual rights. We dare not limit the operations of the Holy Spirit, and we have no right to restrict the manifestations of spiritual life. Men come to Conversion in many ways and, while they find in it common features of deliverance and triumph, they preserve an individuality which should remain sacred to all who would study the movements of the soul. We are deceived when we regard some one type of experience as the only gate into the Church and the life of discipleship. We are not custodians, but evangelists. We must give the invitation with all entreaty and warning. We look upon the waking conscience and stirring will with

reverent joy, but the soul must travel from "the far country" by its own route, and come to the Father's house its own way. This is no plea for vagrancy; it is a defence of that liberty which is our spiritual birthright. Vitality is always varied in expression, while it obeys general laws which we may study.

There is Conversion by crisis. It is instantaneous, explosive, and unexpected. It is an insurgence which naturally cannot be foretold, a rising of self against its evil past, and a leap forward towards light and life. It may be the result of fermenting forces in the sub-soul. It may be the result of impressions and tendencies long hidden in the subliminal self. If we knew all, we might find the crisis to be the consequence of many a forgotten yesterday. Still it appeals to us as an uprush of personality, a revolution of will, which is unforeseen, a hot swift revulsion and choice in which all life is changed. It is a miracle of grace, a new creation of omnipotent love, and we accept the amazing result, while the process is hidden from our eyes. It is at once the glory and vindication of evangelism, and we shall be bankrupt of power if ever we lose our expectation of sudden conversions. They should be the normal consequence of a Gospel that has no rival, and we must take care lest our amazement should become a confession of our unbelief. It is no credit to us when we place sudden conversions outside the ordinary experience of the Church, and reserve them for special missions with their advertised sensations and crowded excitements. Pentecost

was not a solitary miracle, never to be repeated; it is the possibility of the Christian Evangel always and everywhere.

Conversion is more widely recognized than we have usually supposed. John Stuart Mill tells us how he moved out of the atheism of his father into the deism of Wordsworth through reading his poems. He tells us of his depression, which was similar¹ to what Methodists call "Conviction of Sin," and how he was delivered from his habitual depression and was never again subject to it. Carlyle, in his most personal of books, tells us² of a Conversion that saved him from negation and cowardice into a positive and courageous view of life. "It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New Birth, or Baptometric Fire-baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a man." Neither of these conversions is evangelical, but they do suggest that a sudden change of view and will is not so abnormal as we suppose. Tolstoy tells us, with much elaboration, how faith in the existence of God saved him from utter despair:³ "I need only be aware of God to live; I need only forget Him or disbelieve in Him and I die. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life. Live seeking God, and then you will not live without God. And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me."

¹ "Autobiography," Chapter V.

² "Sartor Resartus," Book II., Chapter VII.

³ "My Confession."

We need make no apology for the word Conversion. It affirms the greatest fact in human experience. It is a tremendous and blessed reality. Carlyle pays tribute to the very word :¹ " Blame not the word, rejoice rather that such a word signifying such a thing has come to light in our modern Era, though hidden from the wisest Ancients. The Old World knew nothing of Conversion ; instead of an '*Ecce Homo*' they had only some '*Choice of Hercules*.' It was a new-attained progress in the Moral Development of man : hereby has the Highest come home to the bosoms of the most Limited ; what to Plato was but a hallucination, and to Socrates a chimera, is now clear and certain to your Zinzendorfs, your Wesleys, and the poorest of their Pietists and Methodists."

We would welcome all that social reform and education can bring to us, but we dare not abandon the mighty fact of Conversion, instantaneous, complete, and enduring.

Sudden conversions have been seen in all Gospel history. Benjamin Jowett and Prof. Leuba tell us that "among the first believers conversion was almost always sudden." "Sudden conversions seem to have been the rule." We see it in the summons of the disciples, the amazing call of Saul of Tarsus, and the dramatic surrender of the Philippian jailor. We give the lie to the surest history if we doubt the conversions which are accomplished by moral earthquake and fire. We can see the reason when we remember that all the power, authority,

¹ " Sartor Resartus," Book II., Chapter X.

custom, and prejudice of the old world were set against the new faith. No man could enter it by normal paths of culture and growth. He had to bid defiance to all the conditions of his life, to break away from the schools, and challenge society. Such a resistance required the urge of passion, the impulse that was a flame more than a calculation. Conversion was a fiery experience, for only thus could it arouse the attention of a world of moral apathy and vicious obstinacy. The movement that was to level the proudest philosophers, and shake the most sovereign dynasties, must be militant in its marvel while bloodless in its weapons. Its dynamic word that could not be denied was sudden conversion.

The same principle is seen in every new religious movement that would challenge the world. It was the feature of early Methodism, the provocation of the Salvation Army, and is seen to-day in the new zeal that has captured the crusaders among younger Methodism. We must revive the expectation of our fathers if we would perpetuate their triumphs. The faith in sudden conversion, says Prof. W. James, is "the profounder spiritual instinct." John Wesley believed it to be the normal way to salvation. He says:¹ "In London alone I found 652 members of our Society who were exceeding clear in their experience, and whose testimony I could see no reason to doubt. And every one of these (without a single exception) has declared that his deliverance from sin was instantaneous, that the

¹ Tyerman's "Life of Wesley," I., 463.

change was wrought in a moment. Had half of these, or one third, or one in twenty, declared it was *gradually* wrought in them, I should have believed this with regard to them, and thought that some were gradually sanctified, and some instantaneously. But as I have not found, in so long a space of time, a single person speaking thus, I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work."

To this conclusion Wesley was inclined by the Moravians, to whom he owed much. It is this simple confidence that fills the earliest Methodist magazines with radiant romance. It is this assurance which makes Evangelism triumphant, and we dare not surrender it, not even to give emphasis to the gradual advent of spiritual life through the Christian nurture of the child. We still believe in miracles, for we have seen them in these days. We believe a man may be dead in trespasses and sin, buried deep in corrupting vices, and yet he can be quickened into life, and lifted into purity and nobility in a moment, and his conversion may be complete and enduring. If we lose this faith our Evangel is deprived of swift and surest victory. When Harold Begbie wrote his "Broken Earthenware," even preachers spoke as if his graphic stories of sudden conversion were a new discovery. Our surprise was our reproach, and testified that we had moved far from the confidence which has its warrant in the New Testament, and its vindication in the Evangelism which has thrilled every generation.

Prof. William James startled scholars with his learned defence of instantaneous conversion. He was not first in the field, and quotes from earlier explorers into this wondrous phenomenon, but his vivid speech, audacious challenge, and blunt rejection of materialistic explanations filled two continents with wonder. We are grateful for the learning that vindicates the simple faith of our fathers, but we are not dependent on philosophers and story-writers. We find Conversion in many a prayer-meeting and class-meeting. We did not receive it from the schools, and if psychologists should ever change their views and label sudden conversion as hysteria, explosive emotionalism, a strange and contagious frenzy, a mass movement confessing loss of volitional self-control, we shall not be afraid nor ashamed, for we have the fact in redeemed experience, and often have we seen "the signs infallible."

It is a distinct gain to be told that Conversion by crisis is not irrational, but is consistent with the laws of mind and personality. Prof. W. James confesses:¹ "Were we writing the story of the mind from the purely natural history point of view, with no religious interest whatever, we should still have to write down man's liability to sudden and complete conversion as one of his most curious peculiarities."

Prof. Leuba is not concerned with the Evangelical side of Conversion, but he gives a large place to the

¹ "Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 230.

fact, and describes it as "the attaining of a unity within the moral sense the joyous conviction and assurance that all is well with one." He calls that confidence faith, but to us faith has a more vital and personal meaning. It centres not in a sense of well-being, but in the Saviour Christ. Its first thought is not unity within, but reconciliation with God. The darkest tragedy from which we must be saved is not division of self, but separation from God.

Psychology agrees with faith in its view of Conversion as an act of self-surrender. Starbuck is quite clear here:¹ "The personal will must be given up; in many cases relief persistently refuses to come until the person ceases to resist, or to make an effort in the direction he desires to go." This surrender may be the work of a moment, for, says the same writer, "It is a common occurrence that the new life comes in strange and unexpected ways; the amount of surprise is an index of the angle between the direction of the will and the normal lines of growth."

We need not pursue the technical explanations given by professors of contending schools as to the mental process of Conversion. We are not helped when we are told that the value of faith "lies solely in the fact that it is the psychic correlate of a biological growth reducing contending desires to one direction; a growth which expresses itself in new effective states and new reactions, in larger, nobler, and more Christlike activities." We prefer

¹ "The Psychology of Religion," p. 113.

the explanation given by K. J. Saunders :¹ " When human help seems of no avail, and the will is broken down and helpless, the sinner holds out his hands in utter submission, and then, how he cannot explain, there comes an answering touch which thrills and recreates him."

We understand that Conversion is more than a change of mental view or moral conduct; it is a change of personal relation to God, and that change is made actual in our vision of God as declared in the word and work of Christ. It is when we mourn our wrong done to God, when we accept pardon made possible in the sacrifice of Christ, and when we turn our faces towards the Lord of Love that we are converted. It is as we realize our sin, and perceive that no human power can help us, that we fall into the anguish of conviction of sin. The vital element in our pain is estrangement from God. It is when we hear His call and turn to Him that we are converted. That message and our answer may be the work of one swift moment, but its results are immortal. In some vivid way the truth is seen, the soul makes reply, and in a sudden flash the work of conversion is done.

Sudden changes come to men in other spheres, moving them to new activities, and firing them with new ambitions. In this way poets and prophets are made; reformers and teachers are flung upon their tasks. Most of us have known some passionate moment which has revolutionized our whole career. It may be a great sorrow, or love,

¹ " Adventures of the Christian Soul," p. 79.

or rush of enthusiasm, but after that one crowded moment we are never the same again.¹

“ Oh, not alone when life flows still do truth
And power emerge, but also when strange chance
Ruffles its current.”

By the law of association, or by imperative urge, it calls to consciousness and volition the hidden stores of impression, memory, and aspiration which have been away out of sight, perhaps buried under years of carelessness and sin. There are moral affirmations and possibilities to which the Evangel makes its call. If these things were not within us the message would never be heard, and no response could ever be given. The divine spark has never quite died out of the worst of men. It is a possibility if nothing more, a nerve withered, but not dead. In Conversion it feels the quick thrill of life, and its awakening may be the work of a swift and blessed moment. Conversion by revolution is not to be denied by thoughtful men.

It need cause no surprise if Conversions which are catastrophic are accompanied with the strange phenomena of voices, lights, trances, and ecstasies, which easily pass into physical convulsion. These signs have been seen in most great revivals. When masses of men and women are hurled into this crisis of moral revolution and spiritual birth, they easily pass into wild excesses, and may fall into sad sensualities. They were an anxiety to Edwards, a trouble to Wesley, and caused some reproach to the last Welsh Revival. All forms of automatisms

¹ Browning's "Paracelsus," Vol. I., 71.

may accompany passionate conversion, especially when it is multiplied in an excited crowd. It need not be either a wilful hypocrisy or a nerve orgy. There is a great nerve world which we have only just begun to explore, but these amazing tokens have no spiritual significance. They are possible incidents, but they are not of the essence of conversion. The converts who are most marked by these outbursts of uncontrolled excitement give no evidence of increased stability or enriched virtue. Many of these strange tokens are the result of nervous instability rather than signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The men who have seen most of Conversion on many continents would warn us against the hysterical reactions which waste moral power, even though they are loudest in their professions of change of life. The purpose of salvation is not a spectacle. It is life, obedient, holy, true, and brave. In modesty and quietness it will most truly show its power.

Sudden conversions have laws which they obey, as must all the other facts of life. Their causation is intelligible if only we can realize the condition of the man who becomes a convert.

To some, memory is the Evangelist who will not be denied. One day I visited a prison hospital in France during the war. I found, diseased and despairing, a man I had known in England. I knew his wife, a gentle modest woman, whose heart would have broken had she known her husband's shame. He would have hidden from me, but I pursued him in Christ's stead. I compelled him

to think of wife and home, of church and school in England. As I spoke with faltering speech, memory enforced my plea. His rebellion and hardness of heart melted. He mourned, and confessed his sin. He trusted in Christ for mercy. Before I left that camp he was converted, and to-day rejoices in his new spiritual life. I know no pleading that would have touched him but the recollection of love. His shame was worse than any penalty that could be declared. He was hard and defiant. Prison only made him a rebel. It was gentle memory that won and captured him.

William Cowper attributes his conversion to the repetition of a well-known text: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." He says:¹ "Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the Atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fulness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed and received the Gospel. . . . Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport. I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. For many succeeding weeks tears were ready to flow if I did but speak of the

¹ Quoted by Rev. G. Jackson, B.A., "The Fact of Conversion," p. 26.

Gospel or mention the name of Jesus. To rejoice day and night was all my employment. Too happy to sleep much, I thought it was lost time that was spent in slumber." An old text, remembered, unlocked the gate to the new life. The Sunday School teacher, who mourns because he does not see conversion, and covets the victories of the Evangelist, may comfort himself in the fact that he is placing memories in the soul of his scholar, which in some crisis shall leap forth and make surrender to divine grace assured.

Despair is often the prophet of Conversion.

I give the case brought to my observation of a lady, wife of an eminent physician, mother of beautiful children, and queen of an ideal home. She yielded slowly but fatally to drink. All that love and skill could devise was done. Science and society attempted in vain her rescue. She sank lower than the beasts, became vile and cunning. She became impossible, and left home a raging victim of alcoholism. Her past refinements only added to her torture. There was no hope or rescue for her. She drifted to a mission for shelter; out of the gutter she crept to find a little warmth. She found others who had shared her shame, and they spoke of the Saviour they had found. She awoke out of her debasement, hot tears cleansed her eyes and melted her heart. She fought the drink craving till her soul sweat blood. By faith it passed from her, and to-day she has her children restored to her, is honoured by those who know her, and is the friend of the poor. She knows

their life, for when she was fighting for her soul, she refused to trouble her loved ones and entered domestic service. When all had failed she turned to the One who is Mighty to Save. When recovery was impossible, at that moment the redemption had begun.

Carlyle, in his "Letters of Cromwell," lets the Lord Protector tell us the story of his own Conversion: "You know what my manner of life hath been. Oh! I lived in and loved darkness and hated light. I was the chief of sinners. This is true. I hated godliness, yet God had mercy on me. Oh! the richness of His mercy!" It is just when the devil triumphs, as Bunyan puts it, that the soul is ready for the message of a recovery, which is miraculous, but sure in the work of Jesus Christ.

A shock of surprise is often the first step to Conversion. Some little while ago a dipsomaniac came to my church. I did not know of it till after his conversion. I have not spoken to him personally for his home is not in my city. He had sunk to the depths, had lost his all, and was playing with the thought of suicide. He drifted into the congregation, and that night I told the story of American Prohibition. He was startled. It seemed to him that the preacher must have known his tale of ruin. He listened, repented, resolved, and, unknown to me, was converted, and to-day is sober and clean. It is probable that the usual sermon would have passed him by. The subject first surprised and then arrested him. Some narrow

souls that night would regret that I had not dealt with Conversion and left Temperance for the platform.

There is no answer to give such critics, but we are encouraged to believe that the saving Spirit can overrule, and make surprise and paradox serve His will.

Lord Tennyson, in his "Life of his Father," tells the following incident:¹ "Once in an American Church, the clergyman, yielding to some sudden impulse, recited, much to the scandal and indignation of his congregation, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.' Some days later a man called on him, and said: 'Sir, I am one of the survivors of the Balaclava Charge. I have led a wild, bad life, and haven't been near a church, till by accident and from curiosity I went into your church last Sunday. I heard you recite that great poem, and it has changed my life. I shall never disgrace my cloth again.' " Such an incident seems far outside usual Evangelism, but it is a true illustration of the psychological effect of surprise. Nothing is so fatal to conversion as routine and repetition. It is dulness which prevents many churches seeing the converting victories of other days.

The touch of sacrifice is always powerful. Again and again we have heard testimonies, how, in the zone of fire, wild youths were won for the Christian life, not by the professional service of the padre, but by his sharing their perils, and carrying them when wounded at the willing risk of his own life.

¹ Lord Tennyson's "Life of his Father," p. 717.

It is the devotion of love, which prevails supremely on the Cross and then in those who have caught its passion. A soldier, who had been the scandal of his company, was carried out of sure death by a Christian comrade. As they lay waiting for help to carry him to the Dressing Station, they talked of sin, its shame and doom, and then the saving love of God. The soldier who had been intractable and laughed at discipline was converted in that shell-hole. The man who had pointed him to God was killed, and on his return the convert travelled many miles to tell the bereaved family what he owed to their beloved dead. If love cannot prevail in Conversion nothing else will. Professionalism is fatal to those who would carry men swiftly into the converting crisis.

Conversion may be affected in expression, but it cannot be defeated by differences of temperament. No two men could be more unlike each other than William Clowes and Hugh Bourne, and yet both rejoiced in instantaneous conversion. Each travelled his own way, but they met in this vital crisis.

Clowes was daring and virile. A lover of pleasure, he challenged morality if it stood in the way of his pleasures. He was a leader in violence and riot; a singer in the public-house; a prize dancer, a gambler, and a pugilist. He burlesqued sacred things when he was in his cups. With him debauch alternated with despair. He married as a step towards self-reformation, and it failed him. He was seized by the press-gang, and escaped with that clever daring that never failed him. Rev. Joseph

Ritson tells the story of his Conversion :¹ "On January 20th, 1805, he attended a prayer-meeting at seven o'clock in the morning. There he cried to God for help, and towards the close of the meeting, he was conscious of a wonderful influence working upon him. 'What is this?' he asked himself. 'This is what the Methodists mean by being converted—God is converting my soul. In an agony of soul, I believed God would save me, then I believed He was saving me, then I believed He had saved me, and it was so.' At the close of the service someone asked how he was getting on. 'God has pardoned all my sins,' was the instant reply. All the people then dropped on their knees, and gave thanks to God for his deliverance."

Hugh Bourne was a different type. He was thoughtful and studious, and was influenced by the Quakers in his search for spiritual illumination. He was converted quietly but swiftly as he read the story of Fletcher of Madeley. He says :² "I believed in my heart, grace descended, and Jesus Christ manifested Himself to me. My sins were taken away in that instant, and I was filled with all joy and peace in believing. I never knew or thought anyone in this world could have such a foretaste of heaven. In an instant, I felt I loved God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, and I felt a love to all mankind, and a desire that all, whether friends or enemies, might be saved. I heard an inward voice saying : 'Thy iniquity is

¹ "The Romance of Primitive Methodism," p. 44.

² "The Romance of Primitive Methodism," p. 15.

forgiven, and thy sin covered.' Life, light, liberty, flowed in upon my soul, and such rapturous joy that I could scarcely tell whether I was in the body or not."

These two men met at the Converting Cross, and henceforth they became comrades in a great campaign which saved the workers from revolution, gave to Labour its moral ideals, and established a great democratic and spiritual Church. In this greatest of all crises, individuality is preserved, but it is merged in great identities of surrender and power. Both passionate and phlegmatic men are capable of sudden Conversion, for its appeal goes down to the great depths where humanity is forever one.

This revolution may be fired by an incident that is commonplace. It is not always heralded by spectacular and dramatic incidents. Not long ago a group of young Methodist preachers held a mission service late at night. They secured, by personal invitation, the attendance of many drunkards. Simple hymns were sung. The addresses were neither learned, elaborate, nor eloquent. It was a service, the like of which is held every week under the humblest auspices. Twelve men, under the influence of liquor, were moved to kneel at the penitent form. They were smitten in conscience, compelled to confession and prayer. They dared to believe and rejoice in an actual salvation. They were sobered in a few moments, converted truly, and are now impassioned witnesses of the Grace of God. On the physical plane it was a miracle, on

the moral level it was a prodigy, and it was accomplished in a swift moment. The cause appears commonplace, but it was accompanied by some august power which is independent of circumstance and mechanism.

When we study Conversion by crisis we face a phenomenon beyond technical explanation. The most unlikely agencies and most elementary appeals are sufficient to produce vital changes which no school of morals or culture is able to interpret. The observer is often surprised to find amazing triumphs of Conversion associated with Evangelists who are simple and unlearned. They are commonplace, and have no personal or oratorical magnetism to interpret their power. We gaze upon the most tremendous of all revolutions, and can only say: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

These facts convict Froude of sheer nonsense when he says, with regard to Bunyan:¹ "Election, conversion, day of grace, coming to Christ, have been pawed and fingered by unctuous hands for two hundred years. The bloom is gone from the flower. The plumage, once shining with hues direct from heaven, is soiled and bedraggled. The most solemn of all realities have been degraded into the passwords of technical theology." No statement could be further from actual facts. In town and village, in church and mission-hall, by land and sea, multitudes of sincere folk feel these realities in Conversion. They never trouble to label them,

¹ Bunyan : English Men of Letters Series, p. 34.

still less to discuss them, but they are the urgent impulse which carries them swiftly to the great decision. Technical theology is seldom heard in great converting movements. Arminian and Calvinist, Methodist and Baptist are one here. Dogmatic division becomes an impertinence, which is repulsive in the hot and vital experience of Conversion. It is when the fires die down that fusion is denied, but when the tremendous reality of the New Birth fills the thought, men have no time to do other than rejoice in amazement at phenomena which spell for all faith salvation swift and full. When the sun is in the full heavens we need not discuss the pattern of our gas fittings. It is when the sun has set that we are concerned with the mechanism which offers light by substitution. The Converting Church is saved from sterile controversies. The technique of dogma is lost in the glowing passions of spiritual and personal revolution.

Conversion by crisis has great and abiding results. The proof of its reality is not in sudden emotion, but in constancy of life. The man who knows this experience is conscious of a new control. His passions and appetites are no longer sovereign. They serve Another. In this way even predisposition is reversed. Doddridge, in his "Life of Colonel James Gardiner," gives us the case of a *roué* saved from his ruling vice in an hour:¹ "I was effectually cured of all inclination to that sin I was so strongly addicted to that I thought nothing but shooting me through the head could have

¹ "Life of Colonel James Gardiner." R.T.S., pp. 23-32.

cured me of it, and all desire and inclination to it was removed as entirely as if I had been a sucking child ; nor did this temptation return to this day." Here a proud man is saved from a sexual obsession, which of all vices is regarded as the most hopeless. A new authority has possessed him. A new reign has been inaugurated, and in glad submission the former powers which swept life accept the new control. Psychology has confessed how regenerative is this control in the case of victims of vice. It is admitted that the surest cure for dipsomania is religiomania. Dr. G. B. Cutten calls Conversion a cure : " Were it desirable, the church could eclipse the patent medicine advertisers with the thousands of testimonials which might be produced by alcoholics cured by religious conversions."

Experts of the highest reputation, who are not attached to the Evangelical faith, turn away from drugs and hypnotism to find in religion that final control which can lift a man above the dominion of appetite and lust. The Christian finds the secret not in some novel excitation of nerve, but in the coming into life of the sovereign Christ. He is King because He is Lover. The pithless reed, in His hand, becomes the mighty sceptre, before which all bow in an obedience which is truest freedom.

This revolution changes temperament as well as conduct. It reverses instincts which seem inveterate. The case of Richard Weaver is classic, but it can be paralleled by many instances we have known. He was pugnacious and passionate. The

swift blow followed the hot word. He loved fighting for its own sake. He was converted, and tells of an incident down the pit.¹ There was a dispute about a wagon. "Then, said Tom, 'I've a good mind to smack thee on thy face.' 'Well,' I said, 'if that will do thee any good, thou canst do it.' So he struck me on the face. I turned the other cheek to him, and said, 'Strike again.' He struck again and again, till he had struck me five times. I turned my cheek for the sixth stroke, but he turned away cursing. I shouted after him: 'The Lord forgive thee, for I do, and the Lord save thee.' " The next time they met, Tom, conquered by meekness, sought forgiveness from the man he had smitten.

We have seen timid men grow brave, proud men become lowly of heart, and avaricious men become generous. The change has not come by way of apparent growth. It has been swift, amazing, revolutionary, a miracle rather than an ethical consequence. The word of the New Testament is literally true—the convert is "a new creature," and the promise of the prophet is fulfilled:² "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh."

Here is a wonder which is beyond all psychological definition. It is the realization of the impossible in our common life. We can only with grateful reverence acknowledge the splendour of so great a miracle. We dare not look elsewhere for human redemption. Here is more than improvement;

¹ Patterson's "Life of Richard Weaver," p. 67. ² Ezekiel xi. 19.

this indeed is the birth from above. It is the very gift of God.

The crisis inspires a great certainty. Prof. Leuba put this fact in his own way:¹ "Various dogmatic beliefs suddenly, on the advent of the faith-state, acquire a character of certainty, and assume a new reality. As the ground of assurance is not rational, argumentation is irrelevant. The ground of specific assurance is an effective experience."

This confidence is immediate and intuitive; a flash of revelation rather than a logical conclusion. It is a work more than a word, and often seems to violate all the laws of mentality. The Gospel is embodied in consciousness more than reached by studious and laborious deduction. This gives rise to a vital dogmatism which is free from arrogance, but it enables the simple and unlearned to challenge enquiry and criticism without dismay. Homely folk, in their testimony of Conversion, will declare the most profound theological and metaphysical truths without a shadow of doubt or quiver of fear. Deep questions, which the schools regard with trembling doubt, become to the convert objective realities. Grace, Law, Love, the New Birth, the witness of the Spirit—all truths most august and difficult, are grasped in a moment, and possessed for a lifetime. As James Smetham says in one of his letters: "All that deliverance, that liberty of the Gospel, that being justified by faith in Christ, that peace with God, that shedding abroad by the

¹ "American Journal of Psychology," VII., 346.

Holy Ghost of the love of God in the heart, that coming in of the new creation,—all these great matters, with their lights and shades of experience, are settled ‘without controversy’ to me.”

This is the most wonderful endowment that life can possess, and it comes in the crisis of Conversion.

It is in sudden Conversion that the message of the pulpit maintains its audacious faith. These surprising eruptions of self into devotion, with striking deliverance from sin, will save us from the dulness of perfunctory and mechanical routine. We must be eager if we would be even resolute. We must advance if we would hold the heritage we have won, and we must dare amazing miracles if we are not to be broken by the pressure of more common tasks. Many a preacher is hesitant, and many a church is depressed because they have surrendered faith in Conversion by crisis. The waters that are unruffled lose their sweetness. It is in the revolution that is spiritual where we find final and blessed government for all the morrows. We will not falter in our faith.

“The Lord can clear the darkest skies
Can give us day for night :
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight.”

CHAPTER II.

Conversion Through Culture.

WE now approach a form of Conversion that is free from convulsion and crisis. It is the natural culmination of processes which challenge investigation. It does not startle or surprise, but with a sweet reasonableness meets the expectancy of love. We should not exaggerate the distinction, for even here there must be the decisive moment when the will is surrendered, but there is a real fact in what may be termed Conversion through culture. In many the great choice is gradual, temperamental, almost unconscious. No date or hour can be given for this most vital event. It has no violence or ecstasy, no conscious break with loathsome sin and scorching passion. It is almost unperceived, till some blessed moment when the soul wakes up to find that its will is one with God. Conversion to many a saint is the placid abandonment of struggle and effort, and the glad acceptance of a completed gift and revealed glory. It is not a challenge, but a surrender ; not a battle, but an absorption in a Divine Another. It is

peace more than victory, though we shall find in the peace the great dynamic which secures the greatest moral achievements. It is the gentle dawn rather than the lightning flash. It is the child coming home more than the rebel being tamed. It is rest, not of indolence, but the calm assurance that all will be well. It is a genuine Conversion, though it does not involve the dramatic conditions which we have seen in Conversion by crisis.

Frank T. Bullen, in a charming fashion, describes this gentle Conversion : " There was no extravagant joy, no glorious bursting into light and liberty such as I have since read about as happening on such occasions ; it was just a lesson learned, the satisfaction consequent upon finding one's way after long groping in darkness and misery—a way that led to peace. I love that description of Conversion as ' the new birth.' " The brilliant story-writer gives the real experience of great hosts of converted men and women who have found salvation along the ways of gentle fascination, rather than rough and boisterous force. Time was when such a quietism would not have satisfied the early Methodists. Great revival movements always tend to stereotype Conversion on the violent model. There must be sob and song, despair, delirium, and deliverance. Modern conditions would save us from such narrow injustice. It is grotesque and false to expect our innocent children to pass through this fiery ordeal, and yet, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, young children can hear the divine voice and respond with a voluntary decision that

is the very core of Conversion. Above all things, our Evangelism must be sincere and true in its view of life; and to expect the youth that has been trained and guarded in our homes to know the torment and remorse of persistent and passionate sinners, is to play with words, mock the reason, and delude the conscience. We must recognize the great and growing part which culture plays in the drama of Conversion.

The relation of Christianity to education is full of interest. We are compelled to give a larger place to the home and school in our estimate of religious ministries. Time was when education in spiritual matters was regarded as of doubtful value. Our congregations were warned against intellectualism as a foe to faith. Men, women, and children of all types and ages were expected to pass through the same catastrophic experience of Conversion. The school in connection with the church was regarded as only an annexe, and its activities were entrusted to an amateur enthusiasm which was often crude and foolish. Children were expected to sing hymns only suitable to hoary sinners, and they had to listen to sermons which declared them guilty of a depravity of which, thank God, they had no knowledge or imagination. We supposed, in our theologies, that all sons must be prodigals, and all daughters inclined to the shame of the Magdalene. It was all perverse and foolish, and it still lingers in some quarters. It has no just discrimination, it denies the facts of life in the interests of Evangelical uniformity. It saves the Evangelist from

study, but it stains the Church with absurdities that wound the conscience of our sincerest people. We may rejoice that the cleavage between culture and conversion is coming to an end. The process of reconciliation has begun, and while it does not abate its urgency for Conversion, it does acknowledge that our children are born into the grace of God. They need never know the shame of the swine-trough, and without agony and travail may abide in the Father's house.

We owe very much to Horace Bushnell's great book, "Christian Nurture," which was published in 1847. He made, as his central message, the thesis, "That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise." It was a bold challenge to the dogmatism of his age. For years both he and his books were regarded as dangerous. He was condemned because he dared to say that some children really possessed natural virtues, and that, with a right atmosphere and training in the family, those virtues need never be lost. All manner of abuse was hurled at him by those who defended original sin more than they believed in original grace. It is almost impossible to credit the tenacity with which the Church forgot the teaching of its Lord, when He placed a little child in the midst of the disciples, not as a victim to be dissected, but an example to be welcomed. One is often tempted to wonder that the Christian faith has survived the blind obstinacy of its apologists. It would have perished from among us, had it not been for that divine spark which no theo-

logical follies shall extinguish. These old prejudices have left us a bitter heritage, from which we suffer to-day. All confess that the weakest spot in our world-wide campaign for Conversion is the relation of the church to the young. At all manner of Conferences the pathetic question is asked: Why do we fail to retain our children in the church? All manner of answers are given. Methods and appliances, grading and teacher-training are enforced. All are good, but all will fail unless we frankly review our ideas as to the relation of the child to Conversion, and confess that education may serve as well as crisis in preparing the soul for the New Birth and its wonderful advent of the Divine Life.

We have the right to demand of parenthood that it shall create for the child a moral atmosphere in which religion is congenial. He must see religion incarnate in those about him. He must hear it in the speech, see it in the courtesies, and feel it in the constant pressure of his domestic environment. It will mean the fulfilment of responsibilities we have ignored far too long. We must bring child-religion to the child-mind. We must warn him against priggish imitation of the religious customs of his elders. He must not chatter about "his trials and troubles" in the language of his seniors. He must be taught to see that all life that is not Christian is poor and ugly. Christianity must not remain for him some strange experience to which he will come as he returns from the sins that demand confession. It must be as natural

and winsome as his games. Not even to be pious must he be insincere. To pose and pretend a grief he cannot truly feel is sin. He must not aim at religious precocity; he should reverence his childhood, and be taught that God has patience and love for his immaturity. This will require of many a revolution in their religious ideas more than in their pedagogic methods. It is absolutely essential if we are to save our children in days when daring educational methods awaken them to the realities of their own life.

No form of Christian labour involves so much patience and cost. None other gives us so abundant and blessed a harvest. We shall no longer be troubled with chronological conundrums as to what is "the age of discretion or decision." We shall find it our task to develop the instincts and ideas of the child in all their native beauty. We shall watch with loving concern the growth of impulse, the awakening of conscience, and the setting of the will. We shall not hurry to impose adult beliefs, we shall not force professions of conscious religion, but we shall guard against temptation, against false notions of God and His government, and we shall leave the day and the hour to the Holy Spirit, who knows full well how and when to enter the conscious soul. We shall pay homage to the subconscious and hidden possibilities of every child, and wait in the patience of love for that leap to expression which is involved in Conversion. This work will not have the whirling excitement of popular Evangelism. It will not be

dramatic and spectacular, but it will save the Church from reproach, reinforce the Kingdom of God, and introduce our sons and daughters through culture to the actualities and splendours of Christian Conversion.

This type of Conversion is the silent but sure emergence of impulses, tendencies, and ambitions which are the fount of spiritual life, and contain all its vast possibilities of love, religion, and idealism. It is said by evolutionists to be in the individual an embodiment of our religious history as a race; just as in physical gestation the story of a species is repeated, so in spiritual regeneration we see the same process. The story of Israel, and the study of comparative religions, tell us how mankind has risen by stages of culture from the physical and brutal to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Humanity has passed through sin and strife into unselfishness by sacrifice. Unconscious egotism becomes self-assertion, and then blossoms into the altruism, which is the flower and promise of all that is gracious in civilization. In youth, as it moves towards Conversion, we see this long history epitomized. The world is saved by the coming of love, so is he. The supreme incarnation of love for the world is Jesus Christ, so it is for him. It is as the race gazes upon the Word made Flesh that it is lifted into the consciousness of high and spiritual destiny, and it is as our children look upon that Divine form that they are transformed into the same image. We may never fully understand this gracious philosophy, but surely we may

rejoice in this spiritual culture of our children. In no way does this view weaken our amazed thanksgiving for the saving work of God, just as the acceptance of evolution as a working theory need not abate our worship of the Creator God.

Culture does not release us from conviction of sin, but it will be free from the intense agonies which we have seen accompany Conversion by crisis. It will be a vague discontent and restlessness, a yearning for the noble and ideal and divine, combined with a weary sense of inability to reach the goal. It will be rational rather than passionate; dissatisfaction more than despair. Its precise expression will depend more upon temperament than some awful cataclysmal pressure from without, but it is a real stage in Conversion. It is necessary if the will is to be set upon the highest good, and if the soul is to dare the greatest adventure. It will become vivid and painful, just as the individual realizes the heroic gravity of life. Thus it will be saved from automatic unconsciousness, into a voluntary and intelligent choice of conquest through the Cross. It is here we are ennobled, far beyond the tame growth of vegetation, into the pilgrimage of the spirit.

John Wesley is an example of Conversion by culture, in which we see all realization of need and insufficiency quite as vividly as if it had been Conversion by flame and crisis. He was the son of holy parents. He had attempted the work of a clergyman and missionary.¹ He was conscious of

¹ "Wesley and His Century," by W. H. Fitchett, p. 131.

failure, and yet anxious to be loyal to his Lord. He had all the advantages of education in a godly home, a great university, an ancient church, a well-furnished library, and yet he was acutely sensible of lack. His mistake, we can now see, was that he had placed the emphasis on self, on his own motives, acts, self-denials, prayers, aspirations. He had to suffer to find the urge which would compel him to find another centre and forget self. It was this dissatisfaction which prepared him to accept the teaching of gentle Peter Böhler, and rest on three great truths: Salvation is through Christ's atonement alone, and not through our own works; its sole condition is faith, and it is attested to the spiritual consciousness by the Holy Spirit. Those truths sound to us like platitudes; to John Wesley they were a flaming and critical discovery. They revolutionized his view of the Gospel and the world; but, as we look upon him, we see how all the culture of his early years was silently impelling him to their possession. He confesses, in his *Journal*, the mistake out of which his discontent arose. "I hoped to be saved by:—1. Not being so bad as other people. 2. Having still a kindness for religion. 3. Reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers." When he took Holy Orders, he tells us how he set apart an hour or two each day for religious retirement; he communicated every week, and he watched against all sin, and, says he: "So that now doing so much, and living so good a life, I doubted not but I was a good Christian."

All these things were good, but they would have created a Pharisee. They would never have inspired the great Evangelist to whom "the world was his parish." It was imperative that dissatisfaction should arouse him to perceive actualities. It was a crisis, but it was the natural consequent of all his past. While we must not expect our children to pose as sinners of the deepest dye, for all pretence is fatal in religion, we may feel sure that, if our teaching is true, we shall quicken in them great ambitions which will become a moral discontent and a spiritual unrest. To these deep unuttered prayers are promised the gift of life and the grace of God.

Conversion is the right of children who have never passed beyond the reach of holy training. This fact is being acknowledged on all hands, and helps to account for the pleasing fact that many ministers of religion are children of the manse, and in reality have never been outside the services of their church. Their conversion is a genuine fact, though it is free from the dramatic elements which invest many stories of religious crisis with such vivid interest. The essential factor is not feeling, or time, or method ; it is decision. When the will turns towards God it will find its own emotion and expression. Some will be anxious because they feel so little, and may doubt the reality of the experience because it does not flame with the ardour of which others speak. These features are but incidental. The vital quality of Conversion is choice of God and submission to His will, and these

are likely to be more sincere and effective when they are the natural flower and fruit of culture. Thomas Chalmers is an illustration of Conversion through development, but it produced in him a change of life and ministry as great as if it had been startling and tragic. J. Brierley put in vivid contrast the great preacher before and after Conversion.¹ "Chalmers, in his early days, preached morals alone, and with no moral result. He became filled with the love of Christ, and with that power behind him engraved the ethical precepts on the heart of Scotland."

It may be asked: What need of Wesley and Chalmers to go through the ordeal of Conversion? Their brilliant service and thrilling testimony declare that it was through this great experience that they acquired the power which fitted them to shape the character of nations, and lead great peoples to the joy of salvation.

With some timidity I bear my own witness to Conversion through education. I never knew what it was to be quite unconscious of the presence of God and the realities of religion. I was trained in a home where the family altar was a daily incident, piety was simple and unaffected, and the gracious life of father and mother made faith as inevitable as breathing. I was told from my earliest days that I had been consecrated to God from my birth. I had the inestimable privilege of living in an atmosphere sacred and merry, holy and wholesome. At the age of twelve years I became conscious that

¹ "The Eternal Religion," p. 102.

religion must be my own, rather than the furnishing of a hallowed home. I was restless with ambitions to really know and love Christ. I felt unworthy as I heard Methodists speak of their knowledge of the grace of God and their glad submission to Him. One Sunday night, after my father had preached in his Toronto pulpit, I made my life decision, believed in Christ, and accepted "His finished work." I knew I was converted. I was only twelve, but I was as truly accepted into God's favour as if I had emerged from a long course of passionate and rebellious sin. It was the hour to which training had brought me, but it was the supreme crisis that has shaped all my after days. My life since has been marred with many a fault. I have contended with many doubts. It has been my task to struggle with inward impulses and outward temptations. I have been in many controversies, and there has been much which I have repented and questioned, but I have never doubted the reality of my Conversion, and my introduction to a new relationship with God. After a lapse of forty years I crossed the seas and preached in the old church, and was as truly sure of the certainty of my early Conversion as I was at twelve years of age.

My experience is not exceptional, and I would not obtrude it upon the reader were it not that my confession is prompted by loyalty to my Lord, and the desire to help others into this confidence. No true Methodist will refuse to give his witness to this central fact in his experience.

Mr. W. T. Stead, in his account of the Welsh

Revival, refers to his own conversion as a boy of twelve years: "The whole of my life has been influenced by the change which men call Conversion, which occurred to me when I was twelve. . . . My life has been flawed with many failures, darkened with many sins, but the thing in it which was good, which has enabled me to resist temptations to which I would otherwise have succumbed, to bear burdens which would otherwise have crushed me with their weight and which has kept the soul within me ever joyfully conscious that, despite all appearances to the contrary, this is God's world, and that He and I are fellow-workers in its renovation—that potent thing, whatever you may call it, and however you may explain it, came into my life then, and abides with me to this hour—my one incentive and inspiration in this life, my sole hope for that which is to come."

Those who have studied the career of the great journalist, his passionate defiance of wrong, his holy championship of virtue and freedom, his daring look into the world beyond, and his exuberant faith, will see in such a Conversion the outcome of holy training. He needed the full resource of a manhood that had not been stained and wasted by sins only to be repented of with cruel anguish. Divinest architecture does not always require the earthquake, and the fertile vineyard may be found elsewhere than on volcanic slopes. All need Conversion, but Conversion need not always be of the one type. Modern Evangelism must pay more heed to edu-

cation as one of the decisive forces in this great adventure. Mr. W. C. Bagley deserves a hearing when he says:¹ "It is hardly too much to say that education is the largest word in the vocabulary of life, for it symbolizes all those forms that have raised man from the plane of the brute, all those characteristics that differentiate him from the speechless anthropoid."

We continue to glory in explosive and swift conversions, but we must not plunge our children into the distress of Richard Baxter, who was troubled because he could recall no one moment when he first gave himself to God, till he came to see that it was the finest gift of heaven that he should have learned to love God earlier than memory began. He says:² "It was the great mercy of God to begin with me so soon, and to prevent such sins as else might have been my shame and sorrow while I lived. Repentance is good, but prevention and innocence are better." Even in religion the dramatic may become an obsession, and we are more interested in the tread of celestial legions than in the advance of the dawn. Sensationalism affects us when we know it not. We must not allow it to degrade or limit our faith, and deprive our children of the luminous though silent joy which is the gift of the sunrise.

These more gradual Conversions are less liable to those sad reactions which have brought reproach upon many wild revival movements. The cynic is

¹ "The Educative Process," p. 103.

² Baxter's "Reliquiæ," pp. 6, 7.

slow to ask, " Will it last ? " when he sees Conversion the natural fruitage of a gracious process. He sees established the strongest probabilities of permanence. There is avoided that extreme swing of the emotional pendulum which leads to wild ecstasy, followed by a dull depression that is only too apt to seek renewed excitement in devices that are mistaken and even unclean. We will not discuss here the perplexing association of hysterical religion with sexual excesses. The subject is painful, and may easily become morbid ; but every careful observer knows there is the gravest risk of lasciviousness rushing in upon an emotional cataclysm, and all great Revivalists have been compelled by this peril to force upon excited converts the sternest ethical teaching to restore the balance. We repudiate the extravagance of the psychologist who makes Conversion identical with the adolescence of sex, but we are forced to admit that there is a real risk in startling and fiery revolutions of soul. The body shares the disturbance, and will make its protest. In Conversion through culture this danger is reduced to a minimum. The soul is gradually prepared for the decisive moment. There is no storm and need be no destruction. There is no terrific upheaval of the founts of life, and therefore the waters can remain translucent. Habit is at once enlisted for piety. Faith becomes a natural impulse of the inner self. No blasphemies need to be silenced, and the psalm of devotion becomes a sweet and natural speech. Our church registers declare that the Conversions without observation

and tumult abide calmly and surely in the most trying days.

This type of Conversion secures most securely the Fruits of Holiness. The purpose of Conversion is character : it must pursue the quest for sainthood or it is a cruel vanity. Character, we are told by the psychologist, is the result of a constant struggle between impulses and inhibitions. We are driven forward and drawn back. The battle is so constant that it becomes subconscious. At Conversion by crisis the story of tragic defeat is suddenly arrested, and the soul is flung for a moment into the throes of an awful confusion. In Conversion by culture the tide of moral victory is accelerated, and the soul is already inclined towards the goal of saintliness. It is not reversed so much as it is quickened. It will be easily seen what an enormous advantage this fact secures for the search for holiness. To quicken one's pace is easier than to reverse one's steps. This is not a complete view of Conversion, but it is true in so far as it enforces our obligation to urge our children to decision before it involves them in terrific vital changes, which are exhausting when not perilous. If one studies the saintly life it is seen at once that early apprenticeship is an enormous gain.

Sainte-Beuve gives an exquisite picture of sainthood. It is quoted by Prof. W. James.¹ "There is veritably a single fundamental and identical spirit of piety and charity, common to those who have received grace ; an inner state which, before

¹ "The Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 260.

all things, is one of love and humility, of infinite confidence in God, and of severity for one's self, accompanied with tenderness for others." If that gracious ideal is to be reached, the journey should begin in the early morning, and not wait till the soul is exhausted by passionate sins or burdened with loathsome memories.

When we speak of trophies of grace, we point to men and women saved from desperate vices in some swift and blessed moment. We do well to rejoice in these marvels, but let us not forget the ten thousand times ten thousand men and women who, by education, love, and culture, came to their Conversion pure and ready for the Bridegroom's love. Prevention and innocence are quite as precious as restoration and penitence.

This Conversion has great results which are typical, though in some degree they are shared by those who pass through dramatic crisis. There is the breaking through of light. The experience is strangely luminous, and Prof. James finds in this fact a subjective explanation of the floating lights and luminous figures which are a usual feature in great and exciting revivals. The most wonderful light is that which shines upon the mind, and through it, as a divine medium, the world is seen invested with a beauty and glow undreamed of. Finney is graphic and true when he says :¹ " A light perfectly ineffable shone in my soul that almost prostrated me on the ground. . . . This light

¹ " Memoirs," p. 34.

seemed like the brightness of the sun in every direction. It was too intense for the eyes. . . . I think I knew something then, by actual experience, of that light that prostrated Paul on the way to Damascus. It was surely a light such as I could not have endured long."

Scholars discuss in cold blood the "photisms" which accompany intense religious feeling. They are good enough to tell us that all this testimony about light upon the path, and the visions of the opening heavens, is a delusion and not a deception. We are grateful for their courtesy, but we do not grant their accuracy. It is quite certain that with Conversion there is a conviction of revelation. Questions are answered, and problems are solved, and fears are scattered, not by some intellectual process, but by a revelation. It is indubitable, though its speech is beyond translation. It is the shining of a great light, and it is little wonder if this glow within projects itself without, and sees glory and radiance which the physical eye can neither grasp nor retain. We are not wise or brave when we imprison ourselves within the bodily senses. If we are to believe modern research, that does not claim to be Christian, there are real phenomena beyond our observation. They can be found by deduction; they are presuppositions or assumptions rather than provable facts; but they are real, for they are needed to complete the economy of Nature. So we dare to claim that the soul in Conversion, especially when its faculties have been cultured, can perceive a new, wide range of

phenomena. It does possess a light that never shone on land or sea, and in that light it may rejoice and walk the way of life. We need not invite these prodigies, but we would do well to hesitate to regard as hallucinations the glowing experiences of redeemed souls. The man who has never seen this light divine shall have our pity. When he goes on to say there is no such glory he provokes impatience. After all, it is still true that some things can only be spiritually discerned. The carnal mind is no judge of the intuitions of Conversion.

As a consequence of this consciousness of light, there is a wonderful opening of the mind. Some would say there is the birth of a new psychic faculty. It seems actually to be the swift enrichment of powers already possessed as the result of moral culture. There are exceptions, as when victims of drink and lust are suddenly swept into vision, and given the power of prophecy. These glorious exceptions have no explanation save in the miraculous inrush of spiritual powers undreamed of before. Tauler is right when he speaks of Conversion as giving "A new might and strength in all powers, outward and inward."

The world and life, with all their mysteries, become translucent. The mind sees to the centre of things. Knowledge is intuitive and true. Power becomes swift and sure, and the whole personality is invigorated and made capable of wonderful achievement and endurance. It is this which explains prodigies performed by the frail and

crippled, and we need no longer doubt the all-prevailing valour of the timid and cautious. It is because he was a shrewd observer of this fact that Moody directed his mighty Evangelism into educational activities. He saw that his converts would search the fuller truths with a new eagerness, and the result is that his great work is intensified and perpetuated by famous Bible Schools in Chicago and Northfield. Conversion is not the end, but the beginning. It sweeps culture forward with a swifter pace and a more resolute purpose. In the best biography of Rev. Hugh Price Hughes we are told that his Conversion was¹ "The prelude of a singular bursting forth of his mental powers. The opening of the doors of the spirit was also that of the mind."

There is no arrogance quite so absurd as that which assumes that converted people are superstitious victims of unreasoning impressions. In reality, they are released from the disturbance of sin, their powers are harmonized with the central realities of the universe, and they see with a new sincerity, duty, privilege, and all the circle of vital relationship. There is profound truth in the saying:² "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?"

It is this truth which explains the fact that the vital experience of the converted church is always

¹ "Life of Hugh Price Hughes," by his Daughter, p. 31.

² 1 Corinthians vi. 2, 3.

more intense and trustworthy than intellectual dogma. The revelation which appeals to intuition is ever in advance of the conclusions of the schoolmen. Often one is amazed to see how simple peasant folk pierce to the very heart of most transcendent truth, and in a flash they build up a system of faith which dogmatists only build up with slow and laborious efforts. Conversion is their college, and blessed are they if they have been fitted for its teaching by an early moral culture. Jonathan Edwards illustrates this new perception:¹ "God's excellency, His wisdom, His purity and love, seemed to appear in everything: in the sun, moon and stars, in the clouds and blue sky, in the grass, flowers and trees, in the water, and all nature. . . . And scarce anything among all the works of nature was so sweet to me as the thunder and lightning. Formerly nothing had been so terrible to me. Before, I used to be uncommonly terrified with thunder, and to be struck with terror when I saw a thunderstorm rising, but now, on the contrary, it rejoices me."

It is this new wisdom which reverses many an old judgment. It challenges worldly craft and cunning, and is regarded often as fanaticism, but it survives and conquers, and remains to-day the light of life and the hope of the world.

The man who comes to Conversion through culture will be best fitted to give a reason for the faith that is in him. This tremendous experience is not simply emotional, it is rational as well. It

¹ "Life of Edwards," by Dwight, p. 61.

rests upon a revelation that is historic as much as personal. It is credible while it is supernatural. It possesses the historic Jesus while it rejoices in the indwelling Christ. The dicta of revelation, and the certainties of experience are challenged ruthlessly. The convert is told that his moods would have been inspired by other Eastern faiths, and he is bidden to try the unhallowed novelties of Spiritism and Christian Science. He cannot meet this challenge by emotional ejaculations, or the mere repetition of exciting experience. If these are his only weapons he may prevail, but he will have sad crises in which he will be baffled, wounded, and distressed. He is more ready for the fray if he has been trained in Bible literature, Christian history, a comparative study of religions, and the growth of the great creeds. He will not be at the mercy of clever ambush, or rushing onslaught, and will be confident intellectually as well as spiritually. This culture is not essential to Conversion, but it is a splendid equipment for the convert, and it has become necessary to any Evangelism that would win the modern world for Christ. There comes to most Christians the awful moment when the soul, like Athanasius, must stand against the world. At times the prophet must challenge even the Church. Blessed is he if he has been prepared for so great an hour by sacred discipline and training, rather than the naked experience of a sacred and tumultuous crisis. It is from the holy home and the Sunday School that we win our best Defenders of the Faith.

This type of Conversion endures as the saving strength of the Church. Most conversions to-day are youthful. The proportion grows, and it is one of the most beautiful features of modern religious life. We despair of none, and not the foulest among hoary sinners is beyond the Gospel message, but our surest hope is in our little children who shall grow up in "the nurture and admonition" of the Lord. If Starbuck is right when he says, "The effect of conversion is to bring a changed attitude towards life, which is fairly constant and permanent, though the feelings fluctuate," then we have most confidence in those for whom "this changed attitude" is a normal development, rather than in those who can only enter it by means of a revolutionary crisis. We exult in all methods of Conversion, but most of all in that which gently gathers our children into the Kingdom of Light. An ideal will be reached when our teachers are more than pedagogues, for they are called to the wisest Evangelism.

CHAPTER III.

Conversion by Suggestion.

THE Evangelical view of Conversion is challenged in these days by a school of psychology which is arrogant in its new interpretation of the activities of the mind. The objective reality of sin and its conviction, of Christ's word and work, of redemption and its results is flatly denied, and the whole experience is referred back to the influence of auto-suggestion, hypnosis, and excitation of the subliminal self. The whole of religion is self-originated, and even the existence of God is an idea evolved from the subconscious personality. It is all little more than a nerve explosion, or, at the best, a volitional imagination. We believe all the supernatural content of religion because we wish to believe it, and not because it has objective reality. Prof. Leuba is very bold when he says:¹ "In the stress of his moral need man learns to look upon his god as the personification of his ideal, and the purveyor of moral energy. In God he sees realized that after which he yearns, the perfect, which is not to be found on earth. The history of the

¹ "A Psychological Study of Religion," p. 201.

development of gods is a magnificent testimony to the strength of man's craving for power and perfection, and to his ingenuity in gratifying his wants. He has endowed his gods according to his needs, and he has believed in them and communed with them, because in these ways he has been brought nearer to the realization of his desires. The psychological study of contemporary religious experience makes it evident that the God of Christianity continues to be an object of worship not because His existence is rationally established, but because He affords ethical support and effective comfort."

According to such a statement religion is a vast make-believe, its experiences are a fermentation of gland and nerve, and its activities are automatic twitchings, self-begotten and self-ending. It is a monstrous and insolent defiance of the deepest sanctities of life, but it is a challenge which faith cannot ignore. The whole domain of communion answers to prayer, and Christian revelation is swept out of sight as if it was only a genial and empty vanity. Salvation is regarded by these learned psychologists as a sort of mind-cure. Dr. Goddard puts religion on a level with mental therapeutics, and the end of Conversion is no more than healthy-mindedness. The one disease is sin, and it is not real, but only a figment of the sick soul.

It is suggested, and Prof. W. James gives the idea encouragement,¹ that Conversion is little more than an explosion, into the fields of ordinary

¹ "The Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 235.

consciousness, of ideas elaborated outside of those fields in subliminal regions of the mind. It is an hypnosis in which the subconscious soul is its own hypnotist. We are reminded of the wonders of mesmerism : the automatic deeds and words that follow hypnotic suggestion, the pains, emotions, and resolves that arise out of hysteric obsession, and we are bidden to see in these things parallels to the phenomena associated with Conversion. It is not easy to be patient with this learned travesty of experiences, which are to us the most real of all realities ; but this challenge claims to be scientific ; it has the patronage of learned names, and we dare not leave ourselves unguarded before these specious and subtle attacks upon our faith.

Even so careful a writer as Mr. K. J. Saunders is affected by this view, and in his treatment of Conversion makes much of¹ "the psychology of the subconscious," and tells us that the phenomena of suggestion casts much light upon sudden conversions. He regards hypnotic suggestion as a summarized education of the soul, and speaking of goodness says : "The ideal may be kept by effort of will within the focal region of consciousness, and slowly and painfully realized ; or it may, without the patient's knowledge, be planted in the subconscious region and left to emerge, often with startling suddenness, into the focal region." He evidently agrees with the general idea that many professional evangelists are little more than hypnotists. They appeal to the emotions, use many of

¹ "Adventures of the Christian Soul," p. 63.

the tricks of the mesmerist, and invoke the passionate and often unintelligent pressure of the crowd upon the individual. There may be some truth in these charges, but they are a gross exaggeration, and do not perceive truly the actual, if unconscious, ministry to reason and will which may follow emotional intensity. The ethical and social results which follow many a passionate revival are so practical and persistent that they require a better explanation than wonderful expositions of auto-suggestion. It is not only the view which is changed by Conversion, but the man himself. He is lifted not by the elasticity of his own muscles, or the buoyancy of his own mind, but, he says, by some power from without. His testimony is echoed by a great multitude of men in all climes and conditions. He surely should be accepted as a witness in his own case. There may be self-deception, but it can hardly be universal, and especially when the fruitage is so sacred and wholesome. Something objective really has happened to a man who can say: "Before my conversion my motto was, 'Down with all that's up;' now it is, 'Up with all that's down.'" It is as absurd to reduce religion to hypnotism as to declare with one learned writer: "Religion is in reality a perverted sexualism." The central facts of life give the lie to such wild follies.

Here we have the most modern attack upon our faith. Do we create God, or does He save and rule us? That is the most tremendous of all questions. Is Christian experience a reality I may

attain, or is it simply an imagination without substance? May I invite men to walk upon the highway of the King, or do I leave them in the morass of self-deception, and urge upon them the delusion of mesmeric trance? Is there an actual Gospel to preach and a real Conversion to know, or are there only pomps, ceremonies, hymns, chantings, processions, and sermons, all used with ecclesiastical cunning to produce a state of hypnosis? The issue is not always stated in this bald fashion, but it is actually involved in this new conflict. If we yield here we abandon the whole field of Christian sincerity and labour. Our churches, schools, and missions are but side-shows in a colossal quackery. We are deceivers all, and our only excuse is that we have been ourselves deceived. Prof. W. James says that Methodists need not object to this theory. If we see the results, why challenge the cause? The wonder is that so gifted a writer does not perceive that if the cause be a fiction, we hardly dare believe the result is a reality, and we cannot be quite sure that his own seeing is anything more than a further self-deception. We may avoid panic when we remember that the assumptions of psychological scepticism are made void by the same process with which they would scatter the Christian religion into mist. Negations must not presume a solid strength which is denied to the affirmations of faith.

More care is needed in the use of terms in this controversy. Suggestion is that which leads to decision or deed without rational grounds: as if a

man should cancel his voyage to New York because a palmist had read his hand. Auto-suggestion is that which impels by a motive that is self-originated and void of rational warrant : as if a man cancelled a journey because he had a nightmare. Persuasion is the force which inspires resolve or conduct by motives that have an intelligible basis : as if a man chooses another ship for his trip because he has learned on good authority that the ship by which he had originally booked is not seaworthy. Our critics seek to find in the irrational influences an explanation of all the rich content of Christian faith and life. They confine themselves to suggestion and auto-suggestion, and forget that our Evangel is a vast persuasion, resting on eternal sanctions, and vindicated by moral and social results that are the surest hope of the world. Candour, as well as education, requires them to regard Christianity at its best, not at its nearest approach to the native beliefs above which it has lifted men. They should assume that in the greatest, mightiest movement of all the centuries, there is some intelligence and purpose. He who thinks all the world mad is not easily accepted as the herald of sanity. The great apostle states the genius of Conversion :¹ "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

These foes of our faith dare not apply their methods to other great departments of life. In the great world of Art, it may be argued that much of our pleasure is the result of suggestion. Many of

¹ Romans xiv. 5.

our pleasurable perceptions we owe to the teaching of others, but will it be claimed that there is no reality in the beauty of line and colour? Are we self-deceived when we are charmed by a perfect picture or a graceful statue? In the sphere of literature we owe much of our appreciation of stately prose and thrilling verse to the teaching of others. Surely it will not be assumed that in the argument or parable or biography, which move us to the depths, there is no reality, and that we are willing victims of delusion when we yield to the personal magnetism of a great author? In the realm of patriotism, we are largely the creation of heredity and atmosphere. The rush of popular feeling, the pomp of public display, the thunder of the marching hosts, have in them much that is hypnotic; but who will say that Britain is a mirage, that our Empire is a dream, and that love of country is not a real fact and force? In the domain of moral judgments society may be mistaken, but its discrimination between good and evil, truth and falsehood, service and greed, is a very real thing. Who will say that criminals and police, teachers and reformers, are but the fiction of subjective consciousness? To put the question is to show the folly of those who would find in hypnotic phenomena the denial of all reality. Why should we treat religion with a ruthless scorn we would not dare to apply elsewhere? Surely it deserves better treatment, for, on the admission of those who deny its reality, it is the most wonderful, gracious, and beautiful influence in the world.

It does redeem civilization, sweeten the home, and ennoble the individual; and to believe that these results are the harvest of delusion is a credulity more gross than any superstition of the simple peasant.

These men challenge more than a faith, they deny all history. They say a man seeks the Christian experience because he desires joy, power, and peace, and imagines he will find them through Conversion. Why should he look here and not elsewhere? Why should auto-suggestion, the flowering of personalities whose differences are infinite, after it has accepted the dominion of the body with all its lusts, move here? Why should it turn upon itself and seek rest in a faith which, as we saw in an earlier chapter, reverses all its instinctive beliefs and desires? The answer is that Christianity has a history. God has revealed Himself in Christ, who has lived in the world and died for men. His message has lived itself into vindication in the experience of millions of men and women. There has been an Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. They are not only doctrine, they are history. A Bible has been written. It has outlived every attack and question and doubt for two thousand years. Its historic authority is more reliable than a railway time-table which not even the hypnotic psychologist will insult. The historic succession of the Christian faith is the mighty rock on which the critic breaks himself. The Church is not a ghostly fiction, it is a potent history. Mr. T. R. Glover put this truth with

winsome force :¹ " If we study the history of the Church aright, we find that behind each one of us there reaches a long nexus of personality, each link in the chain a Christian man or woman, until we find ourselves abreast of the first disciples in the presence of their Master. Indeed, if we reflect how many Christian characters have contributed their influence to the growth and development of the Christian life in each one of us, we shall find, if we trace what might be called our Christian pedigree, that we are connected with Jesus Christ by a good many lines of descent, and that these cross and recross amazingly. This great complex of relations is the Church."

We are bidden to deny that glorious succession ; to regard the saints, among whom are father and mother and teacher, as ghostly phantoms, and to relegate the Church to some fanciful cloud-land. We are to do it in the interests of psychological accuracy. Thank God ! most of us are too sane to break our teeth on such an impossible proposition.

These proud apologists for auto-suggestions would make it impossible to be certain about anything in this world. Dr. H. Crichton Miller does not exaggerate when he says that this theory, "if consistently applied, would reduce the world to an insane sand heap." It is really a philosophic theory which finds its flat contradiction in the practical life of the philosopher. He tries to escape the difficulty by telling us that there are

¹ " Nature and Purpose of a Christian Society," p. 28.

two forms of truth; one is philosophic and the other practical. One is to be argued and the other lived. That evasion will not suffice. We have an inviolate conviction that Truth is one. It is a harmony, and not a discord. To believe otherwise is to condemn life to a war that has no end but stalemate. It is to swing life and feeling between poles that have no reality, and yet have results which are actual and poignant. That is folly beyond redemption. It is confusion without remedy. It is the most hopeless word which pretentious knowledge ever offered to the sons of men. We cannot and we will not follow such a will o' th' wisp and forsake the actuality of the Gospel, the fact of Conversion, and the sincerities of a Christian experience. We refuse to waste our energies on what Coventry Patmore calls "the frontiers between sense and spirit, which are the devil's hunting-grounds." We prefer the Rock where multitudes have found a covert from the storm.

We find sanity as well as courage in the old Methodist verse :

" Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done ! "

If we restore the word suggestion to its simple and natural meaning, we find it has a large place in the work of Conversion. All men are open to this great ministry, and it is of the greatest value.

Prof. Mitchell is confident that¹ "family life and education, law and business, public life and politics, art and religion, are carried on by suggestion." We are accessible and responsive to events and persons. Nothing happens, whether of gaiety or sadness, but it makes some chord vibrate. We are all susceptible to influences that are subtle and unspoken, but they touch us with gentle fingers endowed with amazing power. Without this faculty we should be shut out from all inspiration and knowledge. Morally we should be blind, deaf, and dumb, and every avenue to consciousness would be barred and bolted by a fatal paralysis. We should read of valour, and know no thrill; we should see cowardice and knavery, and feel no repulsion. We should miss all the sublimity and beauty of life. We should even be unconscious of our dreadful loss. It would be death without hope of resurrection. We should be nothing more than automata, and there would be no spring in us. It is impossible for us to realize how dreary and deadly would be our lot, for the very atmosphere of our common life has been so Christianized that unconsciously we receive its impressions and register its protest. None of us can live in a vacuum, and we can form but little conception what would be involved in moral asphyxiation. The soul has lungs as well as the body, and by suggestion we inbreathe the air of heaven, and by Conversion we respond to the appeal that travels on the winds of God.

¹ "Structure and Growth of the Mind," p. 145.

In religion the supreme organ of suggestion is the Holy Spirit. We believe that He quickens every good and holy thought, all desire to flee from evil and cleave to the good. Every effort of the will to reach after the divine is a "suggestion" from above. It is a spiritual telepathy, and it is more intimate, for it remains our faith that the Holy Ghost dwells within, and prompts Conviction and Conversion from those depths of personality to which suggestion makes its most potent appeal. The Holy Spirit prepares the soul for the hour of decision by co-ordinating memories and impressions into a great message so that the past is not lost. It is focussed morally. It is stored away. For a time it seems forgotten, but it lies ready for the mystic touch which will give it life and speech. Hypnotism professes to have this vital power upon the mind. It vivifies impressions that have been lost, and makes them operative through the will of another. The Holy Spirit does this for the soul. It gives speech to the gathered but forgotten experiences of years. In a moment, by some flash of suggestion, they are ordered and vocal, and man wakes up to cry: "What must I do to be saved?" The man is tuned to expectancy and desire. Expectancy becomes prayer. Prayer involves a decision by the will, however feeble it may be. At that moment the soul has been made ready for Conversion, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Even further, the knowledge of Christ, which we have seen to be the central fact of Conversion, is given by the witness of the Spirit. He takes of

the things that are Christ's and shows them to men. He glorifies Christ. He makes vivid and actual the life, teaching, will, death, and victory of the Son of God. He rescues them from the dust of history and the confusion of contending dogma. We see them as lived before our eyes, and the deepest self leaps to greet the vision. We believe that the clear knowledge of Christ is always enough for Conversion. As Dr. G. Steven says:¹ "It is personality that impresses personality. The Divine Personality of our Lord appeals to that element of the divine in our personality, calls it forth, gives it strength, and will finally give it mastery." We miss this vision by absorption in secular activities and personal pleasures, or by that perversity of the will which is strangely set against the demands of Jesus, or by an exaggerated idea that discipleship will mean mutilation of the natural life. The Holy Spirit clears away misconception, enables us to see Christ as He is; then are we made to desire the good and the best, and in that mood the preparation becomes the achievement of Conversion. Many men miss religion because it appears to be an external pressure. It is an alien intrusion upon their natural affinities. The Holy Spirit works from within. His suggestion is no incantation from without. It is a quickening from within, and therefore is infinitely effective for Conversion.

We have in this study used the word surrender; in some senses the better word would be capture. The suggestion of the Spirit is so aggressive in His

¹ "The Psychology of the Christian Soul," p. 254.

declaration of Christ that we do not simply surrender to a will. We are captured by a transcendent beauty, a flaming love, and a blissful captaincy. As we see, all our shadow and restraint, our reserve and fear, melt away, and we delight to be enthralled and bound in a captivity so blessed. This greatest phase of Conversion can be the work of none other than the Holy Spirit. It may happen through human agency, but the energy is the Spirit of God. John Owen, the great theologian, became a preacher before he had reached this liberty through capture. It was the simple exhortation of an unknown preacher that won him. The text and sermon were not unusual: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" but they were used by the Spirit to fill John Owen's regal soul with the vision of Christ, and from that hour he was a converted, captured man. This is no mesmeric possession. Revivalists can only imitate it feebly. It is possession, revelation, and suggestion by the Holy Spirit. It is this holy arrest and its blessed results of which the apostle speaks:¹ "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." It is through captivity that we enter the freedom of the Spirit.

The Church is a great organ of suggestion. Its stately buildings and lofty spires, its sweet organs and choral praise, force upon us impressions which thrill the subconscious self. He is dull indeed who has never felt the touch of reverence as he has entered a building in which many generations have

¹ Philippians iii. 8.

sought and found the grace of God. The long story of scholar and divine, of martyr and saint, the rhythmic liturgies or Scripture verses, that have been read in human ears for centuries, make their appeal to the deepest nerve of personality. The austere and simple beauty of the wayside chapel, the fervid passion of open-air preaching, and the sweet testimonies of peasant folk, go down to that core of life which is beneath intellection, but it is vital with all the powers of will. The traditions and faiths, the literature and charities of the Church outlive all scepticism, however proud and cynical, and find their response in those tender realities which were our treasure when we were little children. The Sacraments of the Church have been mishandled, and turned into an awful mechanism of superstition, separation, and tyranny, but they do speak to men of ineffable sanctities and beauties, and they keep religion fresh with the dewes of the Unseen. We dislike the word Sacramentarian ; we wage war on the Sacerdotalist ; but let us beware lest we deny a most blessed and potent ministry of suggestion. Prof. F. M. Davenport may charge the Church with using the methods of a colossal hypnotism, call converts " passive suggestibles," and argue learnedly about " mental and moral automatisms," but he has only touched the fringe of a great subject. There is vastly more than this in the ministry of the Church, or long ago it would have gone the way of all quackeries.

In the Church we see massed together men of all climes and races, fused in the one search for

God. It does witness to the Eternal and Unseen, and does produce the most radiant morality and the most loving brotherhood humanity has ever seen. It appeals to all men, has hope for all men, and offers life blessed and everlasting to all men. It is the most powerful and gracious corporate fact in the world. It ministers to men from birth to death. It seals their marriage vows, blesses their children, and buries their dead. There is no crisis or need or duty to which the Church does not bring a message and blessing. It is all pervasive, and acts upon us when we are most unconscious of it. It is unceasing, for it goes on through all the generations. It is universal, for it reaches all continents, and on land and sea refuses to be an alien. It is an imperative we must heed, not because of what it says, but because of what it is. It may use a dogma, but it creates an atmosphere. Its imperative is so wide-reaching that the boldest cannot reject it without positive discomfort. Its ministry has outlived all heresy and error, all prejudice and arrogance, and remains the light of hope to the sovereign races of the world. If only the Church could cease her divisions and abandon her feuds, no power of earth or hell could withstand her Evangel. To try and account for this tremendous phenomenon on the lines of some adventurous seance is a grotesque folly of which science grows ashamed. The silent presence of the Church, with the habit it has created, is a suggestion more arresting than all its controversies. They affect the intellect, and through it may kindle the

emotions, but the existence of the Church goes down to that subconscious self where we are told suggestion and auto-suggestion are most effective. Here we come again upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He carries us through the Sect to the Church Catholic, and on to the Church Invisible, which, as a modern writer declares, "is secure from the contagion of the world's slow stain, and whose walls shelter ten thousand times ten thousand of redeemed ones whom no Church or party ever owned." It is in that mystical fellowship that spiritual suggestion smites the soul with gentle mighty force.

The fruits of Conversion by suggestion are as sacred and beautiful as those which follow crisis or culture. Converts do not fall into classes, except as their differences are the result of temperament and environment. Even here differences never become a moral or spiritual contradiction. Variety in unity is the divine law of beauty everywhere, and nowhere more than in the spiritual realm.

I have visited the Water Street Mission in New York, and it is impossible to realize what its men—clean, alert, courteous, and joyous—were a few years ago. Once they were drunkards, thieves, bullies, a curse to their families, a terror to their localities, and a danger to society. To-day their story of social service and Christian chivalry is the romance of America. Some were saved by the shock of arrest, or the agony of exhaustion. Others were rescued by the memories of an education that refused to be utterly silenced, or, like

Howard Thompson, have been lifted out of the foulest despair by associations which, in spite of all denial, have their resurrection and mandate. He says :¹ "For the encouragement of those who may be praying for dear ones, I would say, 'Never give up,' no matter how hopeless the case may seem. I am convinced that it was in answer to the prayers of my family—especially the unfaltering love and faith of a dear sister—that I was finally led to deliverance in Jesus Christ."

Conversion is followed by endowment of power. It is a vast dynamic, a supreme energy that transforms character and will renew society. This claim to generate power is the supreme assertion of faith, and delivers it from the reproach of illusion. It is here we part company with those who would rank our experience with hypnotic trance or subjective hallucination. Henri Bois states the contrast.² "Illusion only exhausts our forces : it is a sterile and powerless adaptation to an artificial environment. When subject to illusion, we evolve apart from the healthy and nourishing influence and action of reality ; and though we may seem for a moment to succeed in creating something, we are finally conquered by that determinism of things which cannot be violated with impunity. On the other hand, there are religious experiences which show themselves as spiritual forces of remarkable content and power, producing a lasting and growingly rich life, putting an end to

¹ "The Dry Dock of a Thousand Wrecks," p. 170.

² "La Valeur de l'Experience Religieuse," p. 43.

inner strife, and endowing the subject with virtues he could never have acquired himself." To-day we see the timid grow brave, the shallow become impressive, the false made glorious in truth, and the fickle invested with an immovable fidelity. These are tests of reality. Before their judgment all forms of neurosis break down, but Conversion abides the central force which works miracles as it is constantly replenished by the life which is born from above.

The Convert is a source of power for the community. As Gwatkin puts it: If Christian faith is an illusion, then¹ "This illusion has been the great nation-making, nation-binding, nation-breaking force in history." These results are not produced by pretence and fable. They cannot be built on mood and imagination. They can only be the offspring of tremendous, actual, vital powers. History is constant on this point. Imperial Rome was overcome. The English type of civilization has been established in every zone. China is being permeated, and Africa illumined, by men and churches who trace all their power of conquest and government to the central fact of Conversion. The prowess of saints and missionaries fills the world with glad astonishment. Every new epoch of freedom and culture begins with the name of man or woman who has been made mighty by the consciousness of God. Knox, Wesley, Wilberforce, Havelock, Gordon, Florence Nightingale, Clowes, Gladstone, Josephine Butler, and William Booth,

¹ "Knowledge of God," Vol. I., p. 116.

are typical of an unbroken succession of men who, in spite of all disagreements, have found in Conversion a power to shake and shape the world. Their experience is more than a subjective mood. It is a power to create personality, and sweeps humanity into new and sweeter paths. It is vastly more than an emotion. It is an energy, imperious and all-prevailing. These are they who, in every generation,¹ "Through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. . . . Out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." To call these mighty phenomena the unreal products of subconscious suggestion is to mock reason, insult conscience, and give the lie to the truest history.

This power has amazing endurance. Conversion may seem a sudden impulse provoked by the thrill of appeal, the lilt of a refrain, or the pressure of some great emotion that sweeps a crowd off its feet. It brings with it a call to service, and when the emotion is but a memory, the call remains, and is obeyed through all the years with a persistence that has no equal. Converted men hold to their post in spite of isolation, disappointment, and apparent failure. For many of us religious labour is "a long grind," with no aids to enthusiasm, and with no visible rewards save rejection, poverty, and drudgery. We pay our homage to sisters in city slums, to preachers in lonely wayside chapels, and to missionaries who stand alone for long years amid

¹ Hebrews xi. 33, 34.

revolting and cruel heathenism. No sectarian loyalty or professional ambition or personal obstinacy can explain their endurance. It is a miracle, and is the result of a real energy arising from the central experience of Conversion. This cannot be hysteria, for that is temporary. We awaken from the trance. The mediums of spiritualism are notoriously shifty, but here we face character supremely true and steadfast. It has an anchorage that will not fail. Its anchor may be within the Veil, but it is the surest fact in human experience. It challenges discouragement, seeks no escape from difficulty, and defies death. It cannot be a glittering dream ; it is the solid rock on which is built the enduring Temple of God. Christian revelation and experience, which centre in Conversion, are no fair mirage, they are an everlasting kingdom in which the eternal God is Lord and King. We can listen with cheerful courtesy to all that psychology can tell us about the subtleties of suggestion. We welcome every light it can shed upon this wonderful and complex fact ; but we are not moved from our conviction that Conversion is a real transaction between man and God, producing personal and social consequences which are the most splendid and substantial incidents in human story.

We need not wonder that this enduring power produces ineffable and unfading joy. No man can take part in Evangelism crowned with Conversions but is impressed with this feature of sacred gladness. The Enquiry Room, or the Methodist " Penitent

form," are scenes of tragic travail, but they are the shrines of a bliss that has no equal. The song and dance of mere festivity end in weariness, for they grow stale and flat, but the psalms of redemption never lose their power to thrill the heart. The Hallelujah Chorus is not the monopoly of trained choirs; it is the joyous speech of peasant folk who know what it is to be reconciled to God. Here men of differing types meet in the unity of a blissful heritage. A Lancashire drunkard said to Prof. W. T. Davison: "Religion has changed my home, my heart, and you can all see it has changed my face. I hear some of these London men call themselves Positivists. Bless God! I am a Positivist. I am positive God, for Christ's sake, has pardoned my sins, changed my heart, and made me a new creature." Dr. G. Steven quotes the letter of a working woman: "I was like to choke with joy, and thanked God for His great deliverance. Then the peace my brother spoke of settled on me, and the fear of death vanished, and has never returned. I went to the door, thanking God, and was amazed at the changed look of the sky, and of everything around. I said: 'Where have my eyes been that I never saw the beauty of it before?'" C. G. Finney tells us how waves of joy surged over him till he was driven to ask God to spare him lest he should die of intolerable ecstasy. The joyous testimony of Billy Bray has become a classic. "I can't help praising the Lord. As I go along the street I lift up one foot, and it seems to say, 'Glory!' and I lift up the other, and it seems to

say, 'Amen!' and so they keep up like that all the time I am walking."

It is this religion of buoyancy and joy that testifies most effectively of the reality of Conversion.

This message is needed by a distracted world, wounded and bleeding through a war that has had no equal in woe and horror. Humanity suffers to-day from shell-shock. It needs relief from its fears, and nothing will avail but the songs of the converted life. Methodism must renew its mission of joy. Time was when dulness was a stranger to our sanctuaries. Love-feasts were hallowed carnivals of loving kinship. Our class meetings were bright with cheery and pawky humour. Our sermons were punctuated by ejaculations of uncontrollable joy. Our hymns were set to quick music, and our Camp Meetings needed control lest they should run into excess. Our preachers were ill-paid and strictly watched, but they were the merriest friars who ever carried the Gospel to the countryside. They proclaimed self-denial for life with laughter in the heart. They despised gaudy shows and vain frivolities, but they preached ecstasy in the soul. Methodism brought to a dull and vicious age the secret of joy. It must repeat its message to a shattered and embittered world. It will only do this as it calls men to a sure, complete, and victorious Conversion.

" True pleasures abound in the rapturous sound ;
And whoever hath found it, hath Paradise found.
My Jesus to know, and feel His blood flow,
'Tis life everlasting, 'tis heaven below."

PART IV.

THE CALL FOR CONVERSIONS.

CHAPTER I.

The New Revival.

IN spite of all disappointment and delay, there is abroad a restless conviction that a great Revival of Religion is at hand. History tells us that great world disasters of plague, earthquake, fire, and war produce that mood of dependence and fear, penitence and confession, which is sensitive to the awful Evangel of judgment and redemption. We did believe that the revival immediately would follow war. We were wrong, and deserved to be wrong, for war is savagery, slaughter, blood, and mud. The hope remains, an instinct more than a conclusion. It is not based so much upon actual evidence as upon the natural demands for balance and compensation, which are required in any world where divine justice rules. Tragedy that is moral must be followed by triumph that is spiritual, or final failure sits enthroned at the heart of the universe. To that deadly despair our hearts will never submit. To-day the only institution which faces the morrows with radiant confidence is the church which centres all its energies upon Conversion.

We must enlarge and revise our conceptions of revival. We must not imprison this vast energy in traditions that are too narrow for the surging life of to-day. We shall see more than a repetition of the incidents of yesterday, though they seem alluring as memory is tinged with reverence for our fathers. The next revival will be shaped by modern conditions, and will attempt to solve great problems which have hitherto baffled the sons of men. Social evolution, industrial solidarity, educational progress, the development of self-control, and all the complexities of a more vivid self-consciousness will modify the new revival. We shall no longer accept all psychic and ghostly phenomena as real, and men will claim to judge the gift of tongues by the content of their message. We still prize the prowess of our fathers as they stood in the midst of appalling sensualities, and scourged the crowd with terror, or fired it with unspeakable ecstasy. Their conditions are not ours. The years have left their impress upon our race. Freedom has begotten a reserve of emotion and power of will which the most fervent Evangelism dare not ignore. Witchcraft and the stage-coach, the fear of a physical hell, and of immediate catastrophic death have vanished, and we are deluded if we wait to see repeated the incidents of a bygone age. The coming revival will probably have features which have never been seen before.

Humanity comes to certain crises once, and never repeats the experience. We are in the throes of an epoch never known before, and, pray God! it

shall never be repeated again. Victory has not brought security to freedom. Great ideals have failed in qualities of endurance. Peace has not bloomed into contentment, and the world is driven to confession and prayer, impelled to seek a salvation and order upon lines of which the men of old never dreamed. Passion remains, but it becomes more rational and purposeful. Worship there must be, but it will be more ethical and social, while its testimony will be more reserved. It is vain to try to recover dead incidents. Repetition is the paralysis of faith. Even the free-lance revivalist needs to avoid traditionalism, or he is not free when he condemns the ecclesiastic and theologian as bound. It is pathetic to hear the cry for "the old times," for even bigotry can be wistful. Such a prayer will not be answered. If the petition were granted it would be disaster for the world, for it would be an implicit confession that the divine purpose had failed, the eternal feet must retreat, and the morrows must live upon the dead fruit of yesterday. Such a position is a surrender of faith more than a declaration of loyalty. We still believe in the presence of a Spirit, who speaks with the still small voice when the ruder terrors of thunder, fire, and earthquake are exhausted.

We may rest assured that the centre of the coming revival will be Conversion. Without that focal fact there can be no motive or message which will sweep the world into righteousness. The emphasis will still be on the Conversion of the individual, for, in spite of all the claims of Commu-

nism, the solitary man grows more potent whether for good or evil. One man can curse a continent with war ; one man can lift the Western world into chivalry, and two men can fill sluggish Russia with fever. It was never more necessary to secure for personality the right motive and outlook. Psychology finds at the heart of the greatest mass movements some magnetic and compelling personality. Man is the explanation of his world, and his Conversion remains the most impressive and imperative fact of the universe. It is the key to all history, and the soul of all promise. The morrows will have for the Church great changes. Its creeds may need revision, and there will be modification of its methods, but the Evangel of Conversion will remain the necessity of the world and the glory of the redeemed. Its supreme accent will not remain with emotionalism. Feeling will always have a large place, but in the new day it will be harnessed to convictions which are more intelligent and more enduring. Hysteria, as is shown by Mr. F. M. Davenport,¹ is a natural concomitant of religion when self-control is feeble and education is undeveloped. "The passional in religion will never be overthrown, but it will be rationalized and socialized."

Principal John Caird gives a message we need to remember when we are restless for the New Revival.² "Religion must indeed be a thing of the heart, but in order to elevate it from the region of

¹ "Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals," p. 278.

² Introduction to "The Philosophy of Religion," p. 186.

subjective caprice and waywardness, and to distinguish between that which is true and false in religion, we must appeal to an objective standard. That which enters the heart must first be discerned by the intelligence to be true. It must be seen as having in its own nature a right to dominate feeling, and as constituting the principle by which feeling must be judged. . . . Feeling is necessary in religion, but it is by the *content* or intelligent basis of a religion, and not by feeling, that its character and worth are to be determined."

The new day will not quench the spirit, nor despise its prophesyings, but it will claim the right to prove all things. It is this fact which makes cultured evangelism the great need of the hour. We can no longer leave this supreme work to fervid tricksters, hysterical sensation-mongers, and wild hypnotists, who draw the crowd by the devices of a show, or the tricks of a seance. We cannot afford to have emotions aroused and then wasted in vagrant activities that have no purpose or goal. Terrific injury may be done to thinking souls by wild and furious exhibitions which are erotic or neurotic, and not spiritual. Our greatest scholars and most cultured divines can know no higher ambition than to call men to repentance and conversion. Too long we have left this work to fervent amateurs. Our leaders must show the way to the New Revival if it is not to prove a wasteful excitement or a dreary disappointment.

Our fathers lived in the days of Evangelical scarlet and gold ; we have come to grey and khaki ;

but we may be just as brave and victorious in the more sombre livery. We have to attack the strongholds of sin by patient siege and silent sapping, instead of the loud shouting and swift rush of our fathers. We are called to wear evil down, to demolish it little by little rather than fling its records and pride into the bonfires of Ephesus, as did the men of old. Yesterday Evangelism swept crowds out of sin by physical violence, emotional upheaval, and the furious shout. To-day we must prevail by the fragrant service, the living witness, and the tender appeal which does reverence to the judgment and will of those to whom it is addressed. This will involve some disappointment to our more restless spirits; but, after all, the uniform, method, and accent are not so important as that we should reach our goal of Conversion. The conditions have changed, but the shame of sin, the needs of men, the reality of judgment, and the grace of God are constant. They form the enduring theme to which the Church must cling if it would advance in its saving mission. There need be no dismay in the morrows. We have an eternal Gospel. It has no rival, and it will never be outgrown.

It is instructive to gaze upon the revivals of the past. They are full of both warning and encouragement. We do not abandon our history when we move beyond its traditions. We are most loyal to our fathers when we refuse to be bound by their methods. The great revivals were mass movements. The crowd was captured and moved to

furious emotion. In many respects it was like a mob frenzied for freedom, or fired by the magnetic appeal of a mighty leader. Quiet and solitude, meditation and reserve, were discounted and regarded with suspicion. In the wild excitement men and women wept, shouted, danced, fainted, and had convulsions. Evangelists who could not produce these results were treated coldly. The crowd was swept by tempests of fear. It might be famine, pestilence, earthquake, or war. Cartwright tells us of the thousands of people who sought membership in the Churches from sheer panic of the earthquakes which shook the Mississippi Valley in the year 1812. We saw something of the same phenomenon when the war of 1914 grew in terror. These terrors, physical and nervous, were inflamed by the preacher, who declared all disaster to be the penalty of sin, and represented God as angry and taking His vengeance in this form. It is easy to exaggerate this feature, but the truth remains that many of the historic revivals sprang out of a cruel and degrading fear.

This panic sometimes became a fury that had no pity. The crowd was so absorbed in its own excitements and physical symptoms, that it disowned and denounced those who did not fully share these explosive experiences. Nothing on earth can be so unreasoning and cruel as a crowd, and especially when its subconscious depths are fermenting with passions that claim the sanction of religion. Many revivals in America and England have been ruthlessly intolerant, and the distorted

Evangel has denunciation upon its lips. The terror of the Black Death produced religious scenes, emotional excesses, and social crimes from which we may pray earnestly to be delivered.

We see not a little of this feature in the life of to-day. The world-war has left a terrible blood-lust. Liberty is cruel, brotherhood is armed to the teeth, communism swings into torture and democracy plunges into crime, and it can only relish sport when it is full of danger to life and limb. We may be grateful if this pitiless passion does not attempt to capture the patronage of a religious revival. Giddings, in his "Democracy and Empire," says plainly: "From the moment that reason finally loses its control over masses of communicating men, they fall under the power of imitation and hypnotic suggestion. Emotional fury sweeps through them with increasing volume and accelerating velocity, as a conflagration sweeps through accumulations of combustible material." They who covet the old-time fury desire that which might mean final disaster for our troubled civilization.

Intense emotion is contagious. You can see it in any great concourse of people, but especially when they were swept by the old-world Evangelism. The psychology of the crowd is a fascinating study. We see how quickly it is stirred; it is open to appeals which would leave the individual untouched. Its emotion will rob sane and sober men of the last vestige of self-control. Men differ less in emotion than they do in intellect or will. It is the

flaming nerve link of which only the most stolid is unconscious. The revivalist is constantly tempted to win the crowd by shady devices. He must have the mass if he is to win the results that are his popular stock-in-trade. He needs the crowd that he may focus its massed emotions upon critical and unsympathetic hearers. The total emotion of a thousand men is vastly more than the arithmetical total of the feelings of a thousand individuals. It is not addition, it is multiplication, and is a vast incalculable energy, whether for good or evil. We pay all homage to the massed achievements of the past, but confess to some dread when the emphasis is laid upon a return of bygone and passionate epochs.

The old-world revivals shattered all self-control, and attributed the result to special divine agency. We are familiar with the dancers, shakers, and jumpers, men and women falling down in a service as if they had been shot. There is a sect which still regards these contortions and convulsions as evidences of the working of the Holy Spirit. Peter Cartwright tells of hundreds of people being seized with what he calls "the jerks," and Lorenzo Dow describes the same phenomenon. Under conviction of sin men would bark like dogs, and utter the wildest cries. The greatest Evangelists were distressed by these things, and sought to curb them, but the Church, as a whole, regarded them as triumphs of grace. We would speak of them with reserve. We are convinced that their source was not of necessity spiritual. They were incidental, and not essential,

and we can afford to dispense with them in the New Revival. It may be that they were inevitable in the social and educational conditions which prevailed years ago. Our fathers and mothers have told us of these strange happenings, but they had no desire to see them return in their emotional excess and physical license. Mysticism is not involved here, for it is a flower of slow growth, and requires much culture. These hysterical exhibitions were always a peril to the Church. To-day they would be hypocrisy. We shall see again miracles of Conversion. They will be explosive and passionate, but their evidence will be found on a higher and more spiritual plane.

With unbounded gratitude we look back to the Revival which was the birth of Methodism. It had features which were inevitable in the conditions which then prevailed. England had surrendered to the most cynical and degrading sensualism. Wealth was growing by leaps and bounds; industrial cities were arising as by a magic wand, and no religious or educational provision was made for the new masses who obeyed the call of the factory and mill. The State was indifferent or cruel. The Church was cold and lifeless. Politics were abandoned to knavery, and the people were sold to an industrial slavery which was only relieved by debasing orgies of self-indulgence. Green, in his history, gives us a picture of the people which has never been surpassed for social shame. Sport and lust ruled the upper classes, and the masses, deserted and despairing, sought solace in vice,

brutality, a ribald atheism, or a drunken debauch. In 1736, it was said, that every sixth building in London was a drink-shop. It was advertised openly that a man could be made drunk for a penny, and dead drunk for twopence. The soul of the nation was chill and dumb. Moral enthusiasm had died out. Social reform was undreamed of. It was the glacial period of British politics and religion.

We must realize these conditions if we would understand the wild phenomena which attended the flaming revival movement associated with the Wesleys and Whitefield. Nothing but an earthquake could move that England, and nothing but a flame could restore its nerve to responsiveness.

Wesley had discovered an awful tragedy: "Conviction of Sin." He had seen it break into terrific triumph: "Conversion." He knew it as a supreme crisis, and had little experience of Conversion by culture or suggestion. His sane judgment and masterful will impelled him to restrain the violent physical excesses of revival. He insisted sternly on clean and holy living as the truest evidence of Conversion, but it is evident that for some time he took pleasure in these physical and psychic manifestations as evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit. He would be foolish and audacious who would deny that sacred possibility, but he is most wise and reverent who seeks other signs of spiritual possession.

We give a few extracts from his Journal. April 21st, 1739. "At Weaver's Hall, a young man was

suddenly seized with a violent trembling all over, and in a few minutes, the sorrows of his heart being enlarged, sunk down to the ground."

April 25th. "At Newgate, at the close of the service, he called upon God to bear witness to His word. Immediately one and another and another sunk to the earth. They dropped on every side as thunder-struck."

May 1st. "At Baldwin Street my voice could scarce be heard amid the groanings of some and the cries of others. A Quaker who stood by, not a little displeased was biting his lips and knitting his brows, when he dropped down thunder-struck. The agony he was in was even terrible to behold."

June 22nd. "While I was speaking one before me dropped down as dead, and presently a second and a third. Five others sank down in half-an-hour, most of whom were in violent agonies."

There was a time when Wesley was believed to have power to cast out devils and cure the sick. He was too sane and strong to echo such a claim, but he did allow the faith in himself to produce results which we now know need not always have a divine cause. Methodism lives not because of such incidents, but because it was vastly more than hysteria associated with religion. It was verily the power and gift of God because it converted the soul, transformed life, created the new England, and set it upon the highways of education, charity, and reform. These incidental phenomena were peculiar to the conditions of the eighteenth century,

and must not be expected unless we are to fall back into the sensual apathy of that generation. If that happened, the Church would have failed most dismally in its mission of advance. Wesley saw this, and lived to rebuke these excesses. He feared lest they should bring discredit on the Gospel. He dreaded the moral and sexual perils of all this fury. He demands the proofs of Conversion in sincerity and chastity. His sermons grew more and more ethical with the years. He was great enough to turn this great mass of excited feeling into a holy fellowship, a living testimony, social tasks, and human charities which have made Methodism one of the mightiest constructive forces in modern civilization.

The same signs marked the later revival which gave birth to Primitive Methodism. When our fathers talk of "the good old days" they think of intense emotion, loud excitement, and holy tumult. Conviction of sin was an agony of soul marked by loud cries, fallings and faintings, and bodily contortions. Conversion was a crisis, emotional more than rational, and it declared itself in jumping, shakings, dancings, and excesses it was hard to curb. William Clowes tells of men falling down as if they had been shot. James Crawfoot was believed by some to have miraculous powers, and by others to use the black arts. We read of strong colliers smitten to the ground by the preaching of John Benton, proud sceptics smitten into silence under the words of Joseph Spoor, brutal crowds overawed by the holy patience of Thomas Russell,

and foulest drunkards sobered in a moment by the shrill judgment of women preachers. It is natural and pathetic that some among us would have these scenes repeated. They forget that these incidents were natural to the conditions of that day. Labour needed rousing from the stupor of generations. Drink, atheism and vice held the masses in iron and hopeless bondage. Only a cataclysm could liberate the soul. The conditions of that age cannot be repeated or the Church would have wasted the labours of more than a century. The success of one revival makes unnecessary and impossible its exact repetition in the next generation. The Gospel of Conversion remains constant, but tokens of its acceptance change as men advance from epoch to epoch in the world's story.

We need not suppose that the former revivalists were ignorant fanatics. John Wesley was a scholar of no mean repute. He had an imperious mind which would have won him supremacy on any field. He had a positive genius for exposition, and multitudes of cultured people still read his writings with real advantage. It is the fashion in some quarters to speak of the fathers of Primitive Methodism as miners, potters, and labourers, as if that was all the story. Nothing could be further from the truth. They had but few advantages in their early days. They were largely self-taught men, but many of them could read their Greek and Hebrew. They were deeply studious and, early in their movement, were ambitious to create a literature while they preached a Gospel.

Jonathan Edwards had the mind of a judge. Few men could more truly and boldly weigh evidence and declare a conclusion. In some respects his preaching was terrible, but it holds the reader to-day by its relentless logic. Once grant his assumptions, and there is no escape from the theology with which he terrorized a generation.

Charles G. Finney was one of the most passionate of Evangelists. He was a brilliant young law student. His own Conversion was achieved in secret, with mighty will power and intense intelligence. His preaching was balanced and logical. It was like the framing of an indictment or the construction of a proof. He sought and gained the most sensational results. He swept society idlers off their feet. He drove a congregation of lawyers into the wildest emotional excess. He set whole communities ablaze. He called on hearers by name. He drove crowds mad with panic. His sermon, "The wages of sin is death," is terrible to read. When spoken, it must have been dreadful in its hypnotic pressure. He was sincere, and yet in his methods he was a mesmerist, only he never allowed himself to lose control. Audiences writhed, or leaped, or danced before him, affected by the inflexion of his voice. Riotous crowds were melted to tears as he spoke, and proudest society dames became as little children before him. His style changed with the years, and grew more gentle and persuasive, but in his most furious days he was more than a wild fanatic. This fact may give comfort to those who fear that ministerial culture

is fatal to converting power. In reality, the coming Revival will be eager to acknowledge the leadership of men who are able to enlighten the mind as they quicken the conscience. Rant and fury are no worthy equipment for a great revival. The modern age demands light as well as heat. To conviction must be added the grace of persuasion.

It is of interest to observe the change in revival methods. Finney illustrates this process, for from the year 1850 he lays aside the appeal to panic, and all the devices that kindle mass emotions, and his later sermons are full of the love of God, the splendour of the soul, and the possibility of its union with the eternal in the power of a pure and blessed life. The same process was seen in Dwight L. Moody. In time he grew doubtful of rushing mass movements, and directed his attention to Bible Studies, in Chicago and Northfield. Exposition was made the intelligent basis of exhortation and appeal, and was directed not so much to emotion as to conscience and reason. The Salvation Army and Young Men's Christian Association have been compelled to humanize and socialize their ministries. To seek to return precisely to the Evangelism of the last generation would be fatal to the best life of to-day. We are no longer to dramatize and mesmerize. We must move beyond the elementary passions of terror and ecstasy, imitation, and contagion. We can no longer attempt to take our hearers unawares, and rush them into great decisions of which they do not realize the meaning. We shall associate Conversion and conduct with a

new emphasis, and insist upon it that revival must involve righteousness. God does not govern by contradictions, and we may be confident that the Holy Spirit will come to us along the avenue of modern realities.

There will still be passion, but it will be subject to an ethical purpose. Religion will still appeal to the hidden depths of personality, and the hottest emotions will be kindled, but we shall insist that the most fervent religion must be profoundly genuine. In some cases,—and the nerve strain of recent years may increase their number,—we shall see some of the physical and nervous features of other days : but we shall not boast of them, we shall not regard them as the surest tokens of the presence of the Spirit ; we shall put them on trial, perhaps under control, and we shall judge them by their actual fruitage in life and service. We shall move towards what is the real climax of life : a vital fusion of the mystical and rational activities of mind. The practical reason will be honoured, but it will be compelled to recognize the reality of facts and forces which eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard. We shall reclaim something of the old Puritan doggedness, but we shall not sacrifice the Methodist joy. Our proudest trophies will be men who can say, like Everett Hale :¹ “ I always knew God loved me, and I was always grateful to Him for the world He placed me in. I was always glad to tell Him so, and was always glad to receive His suggestions to me. . . . I had no idea what-

¹ “ Psychology of Religion,” Starbuck, p. 305.

ever what 'the problem of life' was. To live with all my might seemed to me easy; to learn where there was so much to learn seemed pleasant to lend a hand, if one had a chance, natural; and if one did this, why, he enjoyed life because he could not help it, and without proving to himself that he ought to enjoy it." In such a confession there is more education and suggestion than crisis, but it is genuine Conversion, and will be multiplied in the coming revival.

We shall never pass beyond the day of mass movements, but they will differ from those of other days. We supposed that we had left the possibility and chivalry of the old crusades far behind us, but when our sons saw the plight of Belgium and the peril of Europe, they crossed the seas to stand under our flag. No distance could chill their ardour, or danger weaken their purpose. It was the crusading spirit with a difference. Not such explosive emotion, but a dour resolve that gathered a resistless momentum before which tyranny could not stand. So we shall see the crowds. The pulpit with a manly, living message never had a greater opportunity than to-day, but our congregations will not be urged by wild panic to save their souls, they will resolutely demand that the will of God shall be done here and now. The Cross will remain the centre of supreme fascination. There can be no other, but it becomes the throne of a kingdom that shall fill the world. Redemption will be sought; apart from that we

have little to offer ; but it will establish a righteousness that is the strength and glory of mankind. The fires will be kindled, but they will be a social salvation rather than a personal fury. We need never be dull, but we shall be more self-restrained, and the rapture of other days will become the practical energies of to-morrow. There will be mystic and ineffable experiences, but they will only win our homage when they bear fruit in loving labour for others. The veil will be riven that we may see a cleansed world, rather than a distant heaven.

Intelligence will be welcomed in the New Revival. We shall see a development of the Adult School, Bible Class and Brotherhood movement. The Sunday School will find a more perfect system and more skilful training. This is not antagonism or rivalry to Evangelism. It is the purpose of Conversion seeking the surest mode of approach to modern life. In this way we shall see increasing numbers of men at worship. They can be captured by a brave and more intelligent declaration of our Evangel. We must see that the class is as important as the mass meeting, and the teacher may be the wisest of all our Evangelists. We may miss the thrilling incidents, dramatic moments, and revolutionary thrill of the old revivalism, but the results shall be just as wonderful, and often more enduring. We shall change our accent from prohibition and penalty to endowment and power, but we shall retain the essential realities of approach to God and surrender to His holy will. Christian

nurture is just as sacred as moral terror, and to the man who can see far, it is much more impressive. We must broaden our views as we enlarge our sympathies. There is no need for depression or even discouragement because the morrows differ from yesterday. The human soul still needs the divine touch. God is still found of those who seek Him. Sin can now, as of old, be condemned, forgiven, and conquered in the power of the Cross. We need nothing more to make the New Revival as glorious as any the Church has ever known.

The coming revival will have an imperial outlook. It will declare itself in a supreme missionary adventure. Its first purpose will not be to swell a church roll, but to win the wide world for Christ. The militant temper will be transferred from the political to the religious realm, and it will be transformed in the process. Already, in years of war and days of exhaustion, there is reported on all hands a missionary enthusiasm and generosity that have never been equalled. No ambition that is merely sectarian is big enough to content the morrows. The magnificent vision of a world redeemed in the fascination of the Cross has captured our children. We shall seek for converts that they may be recruits in the greatest and most thrilling campaign the world has ever seen. It is this larger purpose which will save Protestantism from that narrow individualism which once was maintainable, but to-day it involves limitation and poverty. We are on the eve of colossal spiritual adventures, and we may expect to see great spiritual

crusades in which wealth will surrender its pride, and labour will find sufficient outlet for its yeasting energies. The old revival lasted for days, shook a city, or woke a village out of sleep. The New Revival shall know no rest or pause till it has won a world for the throne of God. All lands are to be annexed to the Empire of the Cross. Such a campaign will require strategy and patience. Hope will often be deferred, but surely its glory shall make the morrows radiant to our faith.

Drummond declares that in the New Revival we shall pay a fuller homage to the greatness of human nature. We shall no longer suppose that to glorify God we must slander men.¹ "A man may be ever so gross and vulgar, but when you come to deal with the deepest that is in him he becomes sensitive and feminine. Brusqueness and an implied familiarity may do very well when dealing with his brains, but without tenderness and courtesy you can only approach his heart to shock it. . . . To know and remember the surpassing dignity of the human soul—for its own sake, for its God-like elements, for its immortality, above all for His sake, who made it and gave Himself for it—this is the first axiom to be remembered."

It is along this line that we shall give to men a compelling vision of the Eternal and Invisible, and thereby lead them to abandonment of sin and choice of goodness. Here we shall find Conversion not only of the man but of the community in which

¹ "The New Evangelism," pp. 280, 281.

he lives, and which he must serve in faithful charity
We may dispense with all noise and tumult, violence
and hysteria, if in the next revival we can lead
the sons of men to do justly, to love mercy, to
walk humbly with God. We are victorious in
the noblest sense if we can lead men to see in our
Lord the source and strength of every grace and
beauty they can desire.

“ And every virtue we possess,
And every conquest won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone ! ”

CHAPTER II.

The Modern Pulpit.

SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL, in the "British Weekly," more than once has called attention to a sad decline in converting urgency in the present-day pulpit. We have profitable discussions on duty and relationships, we have wise discourses on Christian doctrine and its bearing upon religious life. We hear precious declarations of sacred consolation and divine co-operation in crises of sorrow and struggle. We see preachers wrestling with social tragedies and industrial problems. Our pulpits have been captured for reform, and were never so eager to espouse the cause of the common folk. We have no contempt for these things, but we miss the old direct Evangelical appeal for moral decision and immediate Conversion. The word is seldom heard, and the fact is hardly expected in the ordinary services of the Church. Pastors and teachers we honour, for we owe them much, but we are not content to see Evangelists pushed from the central place in our Christian Churches.

A book, "The Army and Religion," has caused much controversy. It has plunged many into a despair that is irrational. Its conclusions cannot be accepted without reserve, for they have been reached in abnormal conditions of excitement. Soldiers are not the only victims of shell-shock. The book cannot be ignored, for it lays bare an awful failure in the teaching or methods of the Church. It does seem as though habitual training has been attempted instead of the summons to Conversion, and the result is most depressing. Church Conferences of every shade speak of discouragement. We are told of dwindling congregations, of declining membership, and of great masses of the people who ignore all forms of sacred worship. They are too indifferent to be hostile, and live as though the Church had no message or living interest. It is easy to charge the crowd with deepening guilt. It is perplexing to reconcile this public attitude with the earnest and fussy social labours of the Church, but it may be possible that the crowd has some reason for its contempt if our pulpits have forsaken their first task of Conversion. Preachers of all types grow grey with professional weariness. Many hold to their posts with a fidelity that is pathetic, for they have lost their buoyancy and thrill. They are steadfast, lest they lose their own souls. Others seek relief in wild Utopias which are a cruel mockery apart from personal Conversion, and others entrench themselves in obstinate resistance to every novel programme. Many seek interests apart from their

congregations, and give their best to science, philosophy, civic government, or journalism. Conversion no longer kindles their ambition. They do not preach for immediate results. They know not the rapture of spiritual combat and conquest, and so worship becomes perfunctory and formal. The devil of dulness holds us prisoners, and too many look beyond the Church for vital interests to keep the mind active and the heart young. There are preachers and churches to whom sudden Conversions would seem dangerous to propriety, rather than the birth of an exultant life.

We would avoid exaggeration. Rhetoric is out of place in an issue of life and death. We dare not close our eyes to facts. We may suffer as we awake, but better inflammation than death. We must restore Conversion to the vocabulary of our common worship. We will not make it the monopoly of a special class of worker, or the label of an unusual form of service. Wherever redeemed men and women meet they should wield a compelling influence upon the unregenerate. Wherever Christ is preached, and the Holy Spirit gives testimony, Conversion should be part of our native speech. The very word is music. It gathers up the sweetest, strongest history of our churches. It is the key-word with which they turned the world upside down, and it is the dynamic term with which we may save and rebuild a shattered world. The fact is greater than the word. It is the greatest deed of the human soul. It is a revolution of life, an upheaval of personality, into which God

pours all the wealth of His love and the energies of His grace. It is the human hand seizing omnipotence. It is the will of man turning to the will of God, and finding its surest victory in absorption in Another. It is a miracle upon which all heaven looks with rejoicing, and to which the celestial legions would bring their aid. It is a transaction in which all the interests of heaven and earth are involved. It is central to the life of the Church, and we dare not submit to see it become a mere memory or a lifeless tradition. The melody of the word, and the expectancy of the fact, are the source of unfailing buoyancy and undying youth. The Church that can rejoice in constant Conversions need fear no foe. Its tasks are achieved, and its problems solved, by the converts who throng her courts. The first need of the day is to restore Conversion to the message of the pulpit and the confidence of the Church.

We must get rid of the lurking fear that we are doomed to religious failure or spiritual sterility. We need not be impatient or fretful for immediate and visible results, but we cannot accept the dread conclusion that we labour with no assurance of success. Harvest is part of the divine law. It is as sure as sowing is imperative. A virile confidence is a great endowment for Christian service. We dare not dictate as to the methods of reaping, or the cadence of the Harvest Song, for the Spirit is free; but we are sure that the Evangel is still the power of God unto salvation. We may be forced into gentler paths than our fathers knew, and have

to accept natural explanations of events which they would have called miraculous ; but we are convinced that the Divine Spirit will still give His witness, and produce moral transformations and spiritual quickenings that are far beyond the power of education, social reform, or evolving civilization. The Cross has not weakened in attractive charm and awful judgment, though its mandate comes with a modern accent. Pentecost is a present-day fact and force, though its message no longer appears with flaming tongue and rushing wind. The glory of the best days was not with our fathers, though we honour their achievements. It is with our children, who shall possess and rule the morrows. It is this daring hope we need : the vision of faith that pierces the darkest shadows, and sees the coming dawn. Fear is real paralysis, and explains the deadly inertia which seeks relief in sensuous excitement. When the Church is afraid of its future it is difficult to see what hope there can be for the world.

When this hope fills the soul, the Church will organize again great campaigns for Conversion. It will be no dull and mechanical repetition. It will have initiative and enterprise. Novelties will be sought and found, not in the interests of a sensation, but in response to the demands of surging life. We shall strain every nerve, and use every resource, to induce men to become Christians. We shall follow the mind of Christ, possess the presence of Christ, work in the strength of the Spirit of Christ. With such an equipment we shall

see bold innovations and colossal enterprises all devoted to the one central aim of winning men to God, as made manifest in Christ our Lord. We shall dare to enlist social energies and moral discontent. The agitation and tumult which fill statesmen with alarm shall be the great opportunity of the converting Church. The courage and self-sacrifice and love of danger revealed in war shall not fall back into a dull and tame contentment. It shall be enlisted in the most heroic of all enterprises : converting the world. We shall call men to the Great Crusade which begins in the Eternal Throne, is made manifest in the redeeming Cross, and to-day calls upon us to attack every evil, challenge every lie, and claim every life for the reign of divine love. We do not covet novelties, but we are not bound to the methods of our fathers. All that is old is not true, and all that is new is not false. The Church will be alert and open-eyed to the workings of the Holy Spirit in this very day. The time is ripe for the Evangelical appeal. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The Church must not be afraid to seize her radiant opportunities.

When the pulpit faces this greatest mission it will need to drop non-essentials. We must travel light for this dashing adventure. We have gathered much that is cumbersome and unnecessary in our previous campaigns. We must wear other armour than the metal harness of our fathers, and it is not likely that we shall carry the scarlet and blue of yesterday. Every great converting movement has

shattered old traditions, and we must expect to shed many things that do not matter in the decisive transaction of Conversion. Whether Conversion be sudden or gradual is not of first importance. It may be a swift convulsion of life, full of surprise and incalculable in its results, or it may be gradual and beautiful as the unfolding of a flower. It is foolish and fatal to set these modes of Conversion in hostile contrast. Both have been vindicated in Christian experience, and will be seen as long as individuality comes its own road to God. It is pitiful to see how energy and passion have been wasted on the mechanism and method of Conversion, when all power should have been focussed on mandate and motive. Men can be the severest ritualists while they wage war upon a bondage to dogma and ceremony, and many an Evangelist acts as though there was no other door into the Kingdom of God than his little wicket-gate. What we seek is decision for Christ, the resolve to accept His law, and respond to His love, and with that end in view we need not trouble whether the decision is the top-stone of an altar, slowly built, or whether it is a convulsive lift to the surface of a hidden and unsuspected will.

We need not be concerned whether Conversion is active and positive or largely passive. In some cases it is a loud defiance of evil, a challenge hurled at the devil and all his works. This is what we usually expect from strong and masculine personalities. It may be a passive surrender of the will to another; the gentle acceptance of a gift and

grace from above. There is here no hot struggle following a swift challenge, but a filial and almost unconscious reception of the truth that God is good and His will is Love. We must not make too much of this distinction. We have seen in earlier chapters that it arises from differences in temperament and condition, but both are Converts in whom the Church may rejoice. We challenge no man's right to be a child of God because of the conditions of his New Birth. He may be aggressive, and come to the sanctuary bearing the scars of battle, or he may be passive, and approach the altar with unruffled calm. Both have their place in Christian experience, and must have a welcome in the Christian Church.

We must not be fretful as to whether Conversion is ecstatic or meditative. Some prize the memory of the black hours that suddenly burst into golden light. Storm became a swift and blissful peace. The spirit was filled with rapture, and no leap of nerve or limb seemed extravagant in such a joy. To others it was all different. Life glides without violence into a new and richer peace. The soul bathes in hallowed and silent communion with God. To one it is the bursting of fetters and the climax of conflict. To the other it is the quiet waking of the soul to greet the new day. It is cruel that these contrasts should be regarded as a contradiction. Insistence upon one type is treason against that spiritual life which is to be the birthright of all men. When we are fired by a passion for Conversion these differences will not

trouble us. God's children can never be all alike. They are a family and not a sand-heap.

We need not be much concerned with theological technicalities as we preach for Conversion. We know that experience must have an intellectual warrant, and our Evangel must have logical form and rational authority. That fact is more imperative to-day than it ever was before. The preacher is strengthened by all the culture he can gain. He will be saved from folly and failure if he can give a reason for the faith that is in him, but he is not dependent on technical accuracy as he presents to men the converting call. We have seen often that dogmatic and sectarian differences are fused wonderfully when preachers are caught in the passion of Evangelism. It is in the non-essentials that our liberty is most seriously jeopardized. It is when enthusiasm wanes that trivialities become arrogant and oppressive. We hear much about life and liberty for the Church. Men grow impatient of "the dead hand." They claim the right to think their own thoughts, give their own message, and attempt high enterprise without waiting for the sanction of Conferences or Committees. Nothing will so surely gain the widest freedom as a great and triumphant campaign for Conversion. The Cross spells liberty to the Church in every age.

We cannot preach with the accent of yesterday. Above all, we must be true to the divine light that comes to the present day. We dare not lay all our emphasis on terror. If we could, we would not do violence to the splendour of the soul and the

love of God. We reverence the great Revivalists of the past, but many of their sermons would stiffen us into rebellion if we did not treasure their gentler messages. Jonathan Edwards had much culture and real grace, and yet he could preach:¹ "You have often seen a spider or some noisome insect when thrown into the midst of a fierce fire, and have observed how immediately it yields to the force of the flames. There is no long struggle, no fighting against the fire, no strength exerted to oppose the heat or to fly from it. Here is a little image of what you will be in hell, except you repent and fly to Christ."

Whitefield says, in his Journal, that John Davenport was one of the most godly men whom he met in America. He threw his congregations into a panic, as he would say:² "You poor unconverted creatures in the seats, in the pews, in the galleries, I wonder you do not drop into hell! It would not surprise me if I should see you drop this minute. You Pharisees, hypocrites, now, now you are sinking into the pit."

John Wesley was too great and gracious a man to revert often to this type of appeal, and yet it was assuredly at the back of his theology. In his sermon on Hell³ he uses a dreadful illustration: "What is the pain of the body which you do or may endure to that of lying in a lake of fire burning with brimstone? When you ask a friend who is

¹ Edwards' Works, Vol. VI., p. 103.

² "Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals," p. 119.

³ Volume II.

sick how he does—‘I am in pain now,’ says he, ‘but I hope to be easy soon.’ That is a sweet mitigation of the present uneasiness. But how dreadful would his case be if he should answer : ‘I am all over pain, and I shall never be easy of it. I lie under exquisite torment of body and horror of soul, and I shall feel it forever.’ Such is the case of the damned sinners in hell ! ”

Such preaching is impossible in these days, and we may thank God for our deliverance. If it was attempted it would produce riotous resistance, and not shameful panic. We make all allowance for the social conditions and moral degradation of the age to which such threats were addressed, but we have no desire to see fevered fears, and frightful reactions which inevitably must follow such a representation of God’s dealing with men. We must remember that it is the sweeter ministry of the Church which has made such dreadful methods impossible. It is said that the pulpit has been saved from these horrors by the growth of education, science, and social idealism. The fact is these genial ministries of civilization have been furthered by the pulpit as it has moved out of its terror of God into a truer vision of the Divine Fatherhood which never ceases to love. The Church has won her own emancipation as she has become more responsive to Calvary, and grown less afraid of Sinai. It will be said that such preaching is never heard in these days, but we must go further, and not allow our congregations to suppose that we have these lurid terrors at the back of the mind, but do

not declare them, because as "Ambassadors" we have grown more diplomatic and less prophetic. We must insist upon perfect sincerity in our creeds, or else we are enfeebled when we would declare the stern realities of the law.

There is a stern note in our Evangel which we dare not abandon, but it is not to be stated in these physical terrors. We cannot weaken in our judgment and condemnation of sin. Without departing from the known realities of life we can declare the shame of wickedness in a way that will compel conviction and contrition. We are taught by science and sociology, that a loss and woe follow sin, which are more dreadful than the material horrors which the old preachers described so luridly. We know, too, that sin has consequences which are unending. It adds to a world's shame. It robs posterity of a reinforcement which can never be repaired. It is one more gibe at the Redeemer, and is another nail in the Cross of Crucifixion. It wounds innocence, and is blasphemous in its wrong to love. No hell of Dante can compare with the doom of evil as the human mind sees it to-day. Its final condemnation is its defiance and betrayal of love. The love of God, of wife and child, of our fellows, and of humanity, are outraged by sin. The body is shamed, the mind darkened and the will disordered by sin. All the fair possibilities of life are denied and besmirched, and the memory is scarred with a shame which omnipotence can repair but never fully remove. In all these facts the preacher has warrant for rebuke quite as effective,

and much more moral, than the preaching of other days. Only it is imperative that he shall believe fully. Any trace of wavering or apology will be fatal to him as a prophet.

The preacher is the herald of grace even more than the witness of judgment. He is called to save men even more than condemn them. Wesley said to his preachers: "Your business is not to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that Society, but to save as many souls as you can." That sage counsel and high ambition can only be fulfilled as we declare the good news of salvation. Hope is more effective than fear, and mercy is more impressive than penalty. In any case they appeal to the higher nature of the hearer, and secure more noble and enduring results. We may rely on chivalry and gratitude as native to our congregations. They are divine qualities which even sin has not quite destroyed. The men who minister to the poorest crowds in our city slums come to think better of human nature and not worse. Rough men can be so gentle to suffering; slatternly women will serve as Sisters of Mercy to their kind. The extremely poor are most generous to the poor. It is to the best that we may appeal with confidence that there will be a response. It is for this reason that the touch of Jesus will always be more powerful than the law of Moses, and to preach Christ crucified is to move men in this age as no hideous descriptions of hell ever could. Our congregations unconsciously have lived in a Christian atmosphere. They have breathed in great ideals,

though they have not known it. We need not begin where our fathers did, for their labours have not been wasted. Men outside the churches are more sensitive to the higher appeal than they could have been without the Evangelism whose methods we have outgrown. In reverence let us declare God at His best to man at his worst, and we shall be amazed at the result.

The instinct of unselfishness awaits our touch. Social solidarity is more than a partisan cry or an economic theory; it is a vital fact entering all our relationships. Communism is more than a question of goods; it is a spiritual reality, the full value of which we have not perceived. We can plead with men to be converted that they may serve and give rather than be saved and enriched in selfish isolation. This is the secret of the Student Christian movement with its amazing social and missionary ambitions. We bid the individual get away from the self-centre, fling himself into the stream of heroic and, it may be, suffering service. We hold out labour more than delights, self-denial more than selfish meditations. We declare the Cross as preceding the Crown, and in some ways more beautiful. We call to battle more than to paradise, and we may rejoice that our sons and daughters respond in a way that puts our fears to shame. This is more than altruism, it is Conversion, for it must begin by the acceptance of the law of Him "who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich." With all its errors and excesses this generation has a great

wealth of love ready to pour itself out at the feet of the Son of man, and the humanity He died to save. Consecration to country and liberty have filled the world with wonder. The same spirit can be evoked by the preacher who refuses the trickeries of selfish terror.

This does not mean that we must regard less seriously the contrast between good and evil. We must present the contradiction and conflict without attempting to soothe the conscience. It must be aroused. It may need to be smitten. We must have a vivid realization of the awful chasm between right and wrong. We can best do it, as Jesus did, by proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God, and then showing how it is opposed and blasphemed by self-love in all its forms. Dr. A. Coe is scarcely regarded as an Evangelist, but the truth is in him when he says:¹ "The awfulness of sin is revealed, not by any abstract, juridical notions, but by actual observations of life. The use of talents, the spending of our means, the hunger and nakedness about us, the sick and the prisoners, the little children—turn upon these and our relations to them the strong light of the Kingdom of God, and no man's conscience can escape conviction."

This conviction is deepened when we remember that every wrong done to man is inflicted upon the good God who is Father of us all. Let the preacher live among men, let him study the realities of our complex personal and social life, and he need not hark back to old traditions to find his call to

¹ "Religion of a Mature Mind," p. 395.

Conversion. It is here in the life of to-day, and its Evangel is still being written in the mercy of God. A new paragraph or chapter with every morning dawns.

The Church must seek her own ethical Conversion. Far too long has she been absorbed in metaphysical speculation and theological niceties. As a result we have had interminable and exhausting struggles about the nature of Christ, the meaning and custodianship of the sacraments. These questions cannot be ignored, but they must not remain an obsession. We must get rid of traditions which have made ecclesiastical justice a byword, and have made casuistry more imperative than conscience when we have been threatened with disturbance by the rising demand of the common people for a larger and freer life. The Church can no longer claim immunity from moral judgment. She lives to serve, and not to lord it over God's heritage. She has great powers, found in no other institution, but they shall not flatter her pride; they add to her solemn obligations. Her conscience must be cleansed at the Cross, and no pride of wealth or arrogance of rank must be able to shelter in the instinct of ecclesiastical self-preservation. We must reject the idea of ascendancy, and enthrone the word service. It is a scandal that the honour and veracity of ecclesiastical statesmen should be doubted, and that in judging of public controversies the Church should make its first concern the guarding of properties and authorities. This must cease if our Evangel is to capture a restless people.

No splendour of ritual, precision of dogma, or eloquence of advocacy can atone for the lack of absolute sincerity.

Truth and courage are vital necessities at this hour. A Converted Church is the only way to a Converted World. When this is secured the pulpit will be free and fearless. The preacher will be freed not only from the binding traditions of other days, but he will, in his own message, grow in depth and breadth, and become alert and responsive to the need and prayer, the sin and aspiration of our common life. He will be a voice, and not an echo; a prophet, and not a paraphrase of other days. A great converting campaign is due, but let it begin within the Church, and then its path shall be direct to the heart of the widest world.

This exhortation is but a commonplace, but it needs repetition, for there is a subtle fallacy of ecclesiastical infallibility found in the most Protestant among us, and it is fatal if we would convert the present age. The tiara and jewelled regalia, the airs of superiority and pose of sanctity are found out. They no longer impress the world. They provoke amusement or resentment in these democratic days. The Church must stoop if she would reign. She must wash the dusty feet if she would win the troubled heart. She must follow the Son of the carpenter rather than the imperial pontiff. If we grasp this truth we shall see the force of Dr. Forsyth's counsel.¹ "Judgment must begin at the house of God. We must preach more

¹ "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind," p. 371.

severely to the Church, and more pitifully to the world. We must make the demand on the Church heavier than the demand on the world." Such teaching will involve discomfort, but it will fit us to arrest men for righteousness.

This ethical Conversion will give us a new emphasis as we declare the Holiness of God. It is here we shall find that moral poignancy which will replace the old appeals to terror. Here we shall escape the grotesque follies of Christian Science and the cruel vanities of Spiritism, and shall abide in the strength of a love that is all conquering because it is all holy. This will save us from the sentimentalities which are compassionate, but do not prevail, because they lack that virile and eternal morality in which alone conscience can find contentment. This will honour the law by lifting it into the current of an atoning love. It restores the Cross to all supremacy, and therefore invests the pulpit with the resistless appeal that has wrought miracles of transformation in every age. It bids us gaze reverently upon the most awful transaction in which the pure Christ entered the dark shadow of God's penalty on sin. As one theologian puts it vividly: "Divine love goes so far in its search for men as to enter the wrath of divine holiness." It is not easy to declare that in some awful way God must bear sin that He may forgive sin; but in that august and tremendous truth the Church will find the motive and victory of its ethical Conversion. God's attitude to sin is more than penalty, more even than pain. It is holiness passing into judg-

ment, and for the maintenance of judgment it enters the agony of sacrifice. No truth can so surely smite sin, strip it of every evasion or disguise, and rally the human conscience for repentance and resolve. This is more than a hard doctrine, it is a mystical experience, and Mrs. Herman states it for us :¹ "Since the perfection and omnipotence of God is His love, He must attain to that perfection by means of sacrifice, struggle, and bitter anguish. It is only when perfected by suffering, *and as so perfected*, that the love of God is known as unchangeable and eternal, beyond discord, imperfection, evil, and all the antinomies of temporal existence—the everlasting, immutable, and all-inclusive reality." This is the loudest call to struggle with evil, for it is only this vision which will enable man "to see himself as having washed his robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb—in other words, it will eternalize, and not destroy, the importance of his struggle with sin."

We must restore the holiness of God to the speech of the pulpit and the thought of the Church. We shall be carried back to the argument of the Epistle to the Romans, in which redemption is shown to be an historic vindication of the righteousness of God. According to Paul, before there could be a Gospel, there must be a transaction in which God can be just, and still justify the penitent sinner. That deed is the Cross. When we have seized that truth we shall be ready to move on to the Apocalypse, in which we see triumphant and

¹ "Meaning and Value of Mysticism," pp. 316, 319.

rejoicing those who have been redeemed from their sins and have come up through great tribulations. "Father, forgive them," is a great prayer. It becomes eternal victory when we see "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

This truth will give passionate urgency to the call of the Church. It will save preachers from what Spurgeon called "fainting fits." He will have the full energy of personality possessed by truth. He will not cease to be an ambassador when loaded with chains. He will be as fearless as a prisoner in Rome as he was when free on Mars' Hill. He dare not falter, and will not tire, for the Evangel is a flame in his bones. His strength is in no official dignity or professional authority, but it rests in the fulness of the work of God in Christ. In spite of stammering speech and limping exegesis, he has a full salvation to offer to men.¹ "Him who knew no sin, He hath made to be sin on our behalf." He never moves from the central purpose of God, which is that we may become righteousness in Christ. The vision is so transcendent that it lifts above all exhaustion and reaction. The most successful preacher of Conversion is in danger of mental and moral exhaustion, and can only be saved by being flung back to the atoning centre. Spurgeon knew this peril. He says :² "Poor human nature cannot bear such strains as heavenly triumphs bring to it; there must come a reaction. Excess of joy as excitement must be paid for by subsequent

¹ 2 Corinthians v. 21.

² "Lectures to Students," First Series, p. 257.

depressions. . . . Whirled off our feet by a revival, carried aloft by popularity, exalted by success in soul-winning, we should be as the chaff which the wind driveth away, were it not that the gracious discipline of mercy breaks the ships of our vain-glory with a strong east wind, and casts us shipwrecked, naked, and forlorn upon the Rock of Ages." Even at our feeblest, we can renew our efforts, and dare all things as we discover that we are co-workers with God in the supreme task of human salvation.

Who could be indifferent in this ministry of reconciliation? Paul does not hesitate to say that this trust is committed to our hands. It is the most tremendous calling given to men. The Church has no higher function than to set men apart for this redemptive task. It may demand from them untiring vigilance, complete consecration, and entire abandonment of all selfish and smaller ambitions. Whatever the critics may say of the Evangelists of the past, and they are merciless in their judgments, the fact remains that he who would prevail in Conversion must call up all resources—bodily, mental, and spiritual. He must equip himself with learning, and arm himself with valiant piety. Nothing that affects life is foreign to him. He must not disdain the workshop, or neglect the cottage, or desert the playing-fields, as he calls men to the temple and the Cross. He will need a holy cunning, a magnetic temper, and a radiant character. After many years' preaching I have a higher conception of the ministry than ever before. "Who

is sufficient for these things ? ” To mediate between God and man, to stand in the highway of common life and call the heedless crowds to eternal realities, to bring to manhood wrecked, womanhood soiled, and childhood doomed, the Evangel of life and power—there can be no greater bliss and no heavier Cross. Every pulpit becomes a Calvary, and every sermon a sacrifice, when we realize the sublimity of our vocation. To preach Conversion is greater than to shape a creed. To set the joy-bells in Heaven ringing over one sinner that repenteth is greater than to govern a State.

It is the preacher we need more than the priest, except that all the redeemed are to become priests unto God. It is not for us to propitiate God towards men. That has been accomplished on the Cross, and he is madly arrogant who would repeat so colossal a sacrifice. F. W. Robertson warns us against the sacerdotal pride which has done cruel injury to the Church, and driven many an Evangelist beyond her borders that he might declare the Gospel of saving grace.¹ “ It was Christ’s work to reconcile God to man. That is done, and done for ever ; we cannot add anything to it. That is a priestly power, and it is at our peril that we claim such a power.” We need no new altar, save that erected in every life that turns its face towards the “ Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” We do need that the redeeming news shall be carried to men, forced upon their attention, burnt in upon their conscience that it may thrill

¹ “ Life and Letters,” p. 656.

the heart. It is the deed of Christ that gives authority to our message more than value to our ritual. The historical facts are the warrant of our Gospel, but its truest sanction is their possession of our faith. It is out of the heart that the mouth must speak.

Dr. James Denney uses golden words when he says :¹ "Christianity is as real as the blood of Christ ; it is as real as the agony in the garden and the death on the Cross. It is not less real than this, nor more real ; it has no reality whatever which is separable from these historical things. Yet it is not in their mere externality, as events in past time, that they establish Christianity or save men from their sins. It is as their spiritual meaning is recognized, and makes a spiritual appeal to men, and awakes a spiritual response. . . . It is then that the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses from all sin. It is then that in His death the Son of man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him."

These historical realities and spiritual sincerities are our truest endowment for a great campaign of Conversion.

The time is ripe for the Church to renew her youth in this high enterprise. After wide experience in Churches of all types, in this and other lands, I am convinced that there is a deep impassioned longing for the Evangelical Gospel. The people will respond to it as truly as in other days. All else may fail, but not this. Preachers who run hither and thither to find cunning novelties, or who forsake

¹ "The Death of Christ," pp. 280, 281.

Conversion to discuss public questions, or denounce modern fashions, are ignorant of the real temper of this age. Conversion holds the field, and present-day preaching must give it a supreme place if it is not to yield to the clamour of platform and press. It is our mission to cry aloud :¹ “ Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” That ringing word is as effective amid the rush of modern life as it was in the wilderness of Judæa.

¹ Matthew iii. 2.

CHAPTER III.

The Victory of Conversion.

ARE Conversions out of date? Must we allow the word and the fact to fall back among the memories of more heroic days? May we reasonably expect to see crowds moved by our Evangel, or must we content ourselves with the slower methods of education and personal influence? Are the conditions of life so changed that we shall see no more the tremendous triumphs of our sires? Has the Gospel lost its dynamite, and has it become a gentle, purifying sentimentality, which can sweeten the lives made ready for its ministry by domestic training and parental example? Is there a real sound of divine movement among the mulberry trees, or do we simply hear the restless aspirations of sincere but deluded souls? Must we rule out of our calculations all thought of revolution, and wait for evolution to move with laggard feet? These are painful questions, and they trouble many Israelites who are without guile. They are not a posture, but an agony. They speak slowly, but they are vital with the urge of spiritual discontent. They are not an infidelity, they are most poignant when

loyalty finds itself unable to bring its Lord the precious spikenard of full confession and absolute confidence. It is not a question of method that troubles the finest saints of to-day. It is an anguish that fears the glory of miracle has vanished, and that we are left with the creaking mechanism of religious routine.

It requires courage to face these pathetic questions. No assurance will be sufficient apart from the witness of the Holy Spirit, but the problem must be considered if this book is to serve the purpose for which it is written. We claim to carry all that is divine and sacred from the yesterdays into the morrows. If we cannot attempt that much, then humanity moves backward. God is in retreat, and better for us had we never been born. The falsity of our fears is proved when they lead us into moral absurdities that would load eternal goodness with failure, and cover Divine Love with reproach. Such a blasphemy is not only wicked, it should be impossible for thoughtful men. There are some impossibilities which cry halt to all our doubts, and the most impossible of all is the surrender of God to advancing evil. The shadows may gather, they do hang heavily upon the landscape, but their sombre victory is only temporary. The sun is overhead. It breaks through, and always will, because Light must ever have the last word in its controversy with darkness. Conversion has been the greatest personal and public boon of the generations that have gone. To suppose that it is to vanish from our ken just when the world

needs it with unequalled urgency, is to charge God with partiality to our sires at the expense of their children. That would be to rob us of all religion as well as conversion, and the coldest reason refuses so malignant and fatal a conclusion.

We must distinguish between the methods and the vast force which will choose its own methods in every generation. We have seen that the New Revival will differ from the old, for its vitality will choose and weave its own vesture. We recognize that modern preaching cannot repeat even the most sacred shibboleths of other days, for truth has never surrendered its gift of tongues, and speaks to each century with its own accent. Therefore we may expect Conversion to show elasticity and modification, because it is a living reality and not a dead formula. This need cause no dismay so long as men listen to the divine will, and respond in penitence and obedience. The ark has vanished, but the mercy-seat remains. The Temple fell into ruins, but the House of God endures. The Shechinah glory no longer gleams upon the breastplate of the priest, but the Inner Light is aglow in a great company of believing souls. The penitent form may give place to the enquiry-room. The spoken confession may yield to the silent vow. We may not count the converts in a census, but their devotion may be real and sweet enough to save the world. It may be true that great mass missions have lost their power, except among our Celtic kinsfolk, though even there we dare not

dogmatize ; but if the community is made to desire high and gracious ideals, we have no excuse for our mourning. We have not seen the drunkard smitten and the *roué* convulsed with terror lately, says someone, but if we can curb the Drink Traffic, and make it dangerous for lust to wrong our maidens, we are really serving the Kingdom of God. Conversion has no other goal than the Kingdom of Heaven established and obeyed down here. It is a good thing to rescue the man that fell among thieves upon the highway. The romance of such a redemption will never cease to thrill the heart. It is quite as good to make the highway safe for our children and enlist the probable victim in the ranks of a clean and social self-protective force. Prevention is not so dramatic as surgery, but it may even be more beneficent in its ministry to life. Methodism began with a versatility that had no bounds other than decency, and even that was doubted by its critics. It must not falsify its own genius by a sullen discontent at the changes involved in the new day. In many it is not bigotry but loyalty that makes them mourn, and we must be gentle as we hear their repining. It is not ecclesiastical arrogance but wounded love that speaks. We may not agree, but we must reverence the lamentation as a tender and holy thing.

It would be easy to show that social conditions, educational facilities, and even international relations have all changed, and we feel their reactions in religious life. Such a study would lead us far afield. It will suffice if we look with sympathetic

intelligence upon our modern congregations. It is no exaggeration to say that the pulpit and the Church have never addressed the like before.

Nature to them is no longer the ruthless terror it was to their fathers. They have studied its processes and watched its progress. In spite of all its devastation and conflict, they find in it ministries of healing and recuperation. The climax of its evolution is love, the goal of all its travail is a little child. Its forces are irresistible, but its beauties are unfading. This lesson lifts our people beyond the physical panic which was the motive of many a religious convulsion. Pestilence and earthquake, famine and fire are still with us, but we ask no supernatural hiding. We would rather seek to know Nature's way, and equip ourselves for the warfare to which she calls us. The physical courage of to-day is a real feature in modern worship.

Education has done great things for us. It has given us a new interpretation of life, its relations, and its possibilities. It has kindled ambitions that are boundless and wholesome. It links us on to the scholarship of many generations, and refuses to be bound by their formulæ. It calls the mind to progress and self-respect, and holds out to it a prospect of illimitable advance. It does not reject authority, but claims to test it. This gives to our hearers a new attitude. Utterances "ex cathedra" are not final. They are not made impressive by clamour. No hypnotic subterfuge can win assent for declarations that contradict the new knowledge which has become our birthright. The Evangelist

must keep on good terms with the schoolmaster, or he is likely to suffer.

Political power has given the common folk a new dignity. Time was when in our Churches the voters were few. Their duty was to pay, obey, and ask no questions. They could pray, "Thy Kingdom come," but they had little civic contribution to make to its coming. Their citizenship could only be above, for it was denied down here. To-day we face sovereign assemblies. Our women, as well as men, decide vast public questions, and have their place in the National Assize. Proudest statesmen think it a privilege to address the audiences to whom we preach. It is probable that Cabinet Ministers of to-morrow listen to our call to Conversion. This fact is not always self-conscious. We do not see easily all that is involved, but it does invest our congregations with a new status, which preachers and teachers dare not refuse to recognize. It makes their sins more wasteful and tragic, their possibilities more glorious and regnant, and their Conversion more urgent and imperative.

Congregations are more self-conscious. They challenge life in all its mystery and sanctity as never before. Dr. A. Coe makes this quite clear in his chapter, "Salvation by Education." He says:¹ "There is probably no precedent for the bold and piercing gaze which the men and women of the Western world have cast into their own souls. The products are various. The psycho-

¹ "Religion of a Mature Mind," p. 321.

logical trend of the novel and of the drama, the vogue that pessimism is having, the frequent organization of religious movements upon the strength of some inner experience or mood, the revival of interest in all branches of occultism, much of the feeling and of the philosophy underlying the social and industrial agitations of the day, and the prevalent self-questioning with respect to religious beliefs—these all testify to the fact that we live in what might be called the psychological age.”

The men and women who sit in our churches, the youths and maidens who throng our schools, wrestle with deep and vital questions. Theosophy, Christian Science, and Spiritualism are familiar terms. They are no longer afraid of the psychic and even the supernatural, and are therefore open to the supernal appeals and motives which are the heart and strength of our Evangel. Mysticism has its greatest opportunity. It will prevail if it has the ethical urge and redemptive power. The crude, violent, and materialistic appeals are needed no longer to move modern congregations.

The habit of resistance has been cultivated under the new conditions. The area of inevitability is restricted as never before. The people resent fatalism, even when they pay it lip homage. The declaration of doom does not sink them into despair. It challenges them to protest and revolt. The instinct of hope refuses to die. It nerves the community to wrestle with poverty and disease, to humanize its treatment of criminals and lunatics, and to see some salvability in the vilest and lowest.

Despair is an exploded lie. The common people look up, as well as behind and before. The air is full of new ambitions, and has become the atmosphere of our sanctuaries. The preacher whose creed has no morning sky may as well cease to trouble a generation which believes that every evil can be challenged in a dauntless hope.

Social solidarity reacts on worship. The instinct of brotherhood will not be denied. The preacher dare not hold aloof from his people. His arrogance provokes amusement more than resentment. Ghostly isolation has become absurd. The common folk have learned by rough and ready methods that we are "members one of another." Both good and evil are social as well as individual. Neither saint nor sinner lives to himself alone. The old Methodist hymns, in which one part of the congregation sing at another portion, are out of date, and can never be restored. Saints must do more than sing at sinners. They have to live with them, suffer for them, and can only find their own fulness of joy when it is shared. Every Church is urged to run a Brotherhood; in reality every congregation becomes a Brotherhood whether it knows it or not.

These facts are influential in modern congregations. They modify the phrasing of Conversion, but they do not make it more difficult. There are some vitalities which are never abandoned, and one of them is conviction of sin. There are some motives that are never surrendered; the greatest of them all is the grace of God declared in Christ

crucified. There are some victories we can never relinquish, and one of them is Conversion, followed by the life that is divine, crowned in all the beauties of holiness. Congregations change, and we need not complain, but "the word of the Lord endureth forever."

The morrows are full of promise for swift victories of Conversion.

New human valuations are full of cheer for the Church. Wealth, rank, genius, and even efficiency have lost their former supremacy. Truth, chastity, sobriety, and service never stood so high in the world's thought. Time was when our churches were obsessed with social considerations that were divisive. The squire of the village, the owner of the mill, and the heir of an estate counted for more than the servant, labourer, and apprentice. That day has gone, and there has come to the converting word a democratic ring which is full of cheer for the genuine Methodist. Superior airs are no longer the prerogative of the square pew, while "God be merciful to me a sinner" is the cry of the free seat. It is all puerile and hopelessly out of date. In that fact is the peerless opportunity of the Evangel which declares the God "who is no respecter of persons," and the Cross which shall be a magnetic centre for all men. These new valuations are moral as well as social. They claim regard for natural virtues and genial graces. The agony of war, with its wonderful revelation of unsuspected human greatness, makes many of our dogmatic moral distinctions archaic and impossible. Even in

religion we must be true to facts. We must avoid artificial sins and pretentious virtues. This need not distress the Evangelist, it should rather give confidence, as he declares the Gospel of Him who could find some promise of grace in the publican and harlot.

Religion grows more practical and not less fervent. Belief will always be important, but to-day it must prove itself in radiant conduct. A dream of Papal Infallibility no longer impresses men. They are not even angry at it. They ask: What is its effect on character? Brotherly love counts for more than dogmatic unanimity. Faith must prove itself by works. Wordy and pious insincerities are loathsome to this age. We have reached a point when a religion that has no final word on right or wrong would be no religion at all. The result is seen in the modern Church feeling responsibility for the social condition of the people, and girding itself to give battle to all that makes ideal conduct impossible to the common folk. We still call men to turn from sin, but that is only the beginning that they may cleave to righteousness. Consecration is as essential as contrition, and has become the key-word of the modern appeal. The old divorce between morality and emotion may have some metaphysical warrant, but it is utterly fatal to that full-orbed, wholesome life which is the goal of Conversion. In this we may rejoice, for it saves our churches from many a cheap reproach. We have been wounded by charges of sentimental other-worldliness because we could not fully deny

the impeachment. We shall not believe less in heaven, nor sing less ardently about its bliss and beauty, because we are resolved to make modern cities free and sweet and joyous.

Everything else has failed and collapsed, and we are left the royal priesthood of a redeeming story that is imperishable. All about us—education, commerce, dynasties, armies, navies, nationalism, and statecraft have crashed into ruin. The proudest ideals, the most invulnerable institutions, and the most venerable philosophies are broken in pieces. Money, fashion, and pomp have become a hissing and a reproach. When men say Christianity has failed, they lie, and they know it. Everything else has failed, and Christianity shall now be tried. God has saved me. He has saved the saints in every generation. He tells me that every man is savable, and, as Dr. Forsyth puts it :¹ “He has commanded His Church to act as if from these wrecks of men He could by His breath make armies of the Lord.” I believe His word ; why should I do any other ? It is that confidence which makes Conversion a marching triumph even more than a passionate plea. Already statesmen say that Europe needs “a change of heart.” America is warned by its President to take care lest it should lose its soul. Germany is promised recovery through repentance, and Labour leaders remind their followers that man does not live by bread alone. All this is but the call to Conversion in many tones, and is the great Evangelical chorus

¹ “Missions in State and Church,” p. 341.

to which the Methodist pulpit is pledged. These are victorious days for our Evangel, if only we are open-eyed and watchful.

All about us there is a deepening sense of God. Men are recovering from the cruel loss inflicted upon them by a hard and narrow theology, and an equally narrow science of impersonal force and impersonal law. There was never less atheism in this land than to-day. It is no longer a fashion, and is scarcely a survival. Men now must be restrained lest they sheer off into wildest superstitions, but at least they are ready for the strong sense of a personal, living and loving God, who would suffer even to the Cross rather than allow His children to be lost finally and dismally. As I preach in many cities I am impressed with the reverent awe which is common to worship. There is less of the mass meeting than there was, and more of waiting for the voice and vision of God. We no longer use Paley's proof of the existence of the Deity. We do not need it. In vague but vital ways humanity hungers for God. Surely this is an enormous gain for Conversion. The Lord is not afar. He is nigh at hand, in the hearts of those who await His coming. There was never a time when to dream about the millennium was more easy. We resist the temptation, for more practical duties demand our labour, but it is a sign and token of that craving for the redeeming and ruling Lord which is one of the most vivid features of modern life. Here, then, the path to victory is open for our feet.

Scepticism stands abashed before our faith. It admits that man does need salvation which seems beyond his conscious powers. Psychology finds these powers in the subconscious self, and traces their process in "cerebrations" that cannot be defined. We have the same sense of need, but we see it fulfilled in the love of God, the work of Christ, and the energies of the Holy Spirit. Our confidence is more simple and ample, and it is more rational. Scepticism offers men dull and dreary negations or questions. We offer them Christ, and they find they cannot escape Him, nor do they wish to. He woos and wins. He captures and possesses by an indwelling fascination which is beyond all compare. Dr. A. Coe often chills us with his analysis of the human mind, and his suspicion of evangelistic fervour, but as he writes on "Modern Manhood" he thrills us with gratitude by his confession: "If we ask whether the religious tendencies of the modern world are, all in all, wholesome, no better answer can be given than this: The heart of our age clings to the Christ."

We hold that confidence in all joy, and in the strength of it we refuse to fear the morrows. We claim their victory.

We have maintained our emphasis on the conversion of the individual not because we are indifferent to the awful problems which require the conversion of society. Our conviction deepens that we sacrifice all when we ignore the individual in the supposed interests of some wider reforms. Converts make reformers who will not quail and

prophets who will not fail. It is as we save men from sin that we secure the saviours of every generation. History is full of illustrations of this truth. Slavery was abolished, charity begotten, and education established by converted men and women. Aback of every great social redemption we find the radiant name of some solitary soul who was nerved to challenge the world, flesh, and devil in the strength which became his as he yielded to the call of Jesus.

Two terrific poisons to-day threaten us with racial suicide. They are alcoholic and venereal. Their story is hideous, and their ravages are appalling. Remedies are found in control and restrictions and cures which are partial, cowardly, and in some cases immoral. The only sure way of saving our nation from Drink and Lust is by Conversion. Every personality we win from sin and enrol for Christ becomes a challenge to evil and a recruit for righteousness. Conversion is the way to Conquest, and the pure heart shall win the Kingdom when all else must fail.

The centre of it all is the Cross. There our own Conversion was accomplished, there we received the summons and equipment for the great declaration. There we find all motive and ideal and urgency with which we can bid men yield themselves to the love of the holy God. There we return when weary and baffled to find an inspiration which shall never lose its glorious power. A Gospel without the Cross has no saving Evangel, and a pulpit without the Cross shall have no victories of

Conversion. After two thousand years that central Cross still stands, the shrine of revelation, the supreme deed of God, the final word of love, and the only hope of a sinful world. We refuse to give the Cross a second place. We have no time to discuss the theories with which sectaries have dimmed its glory. We are cleansed in its vision, and we live by its power. It is our bulwark and boast, our strength and song.

“ O Thou dear suff’ring Son of God,
How doth Thy heart to sinners move ?
Sprinkle on us Thy precious blood,
And melt us with Thy dying love.”

Here we have the secret of eternal buoyancy. We do not ignore the difficulties of our age. We are not blind to the novelties and ingenuities of evil. It is not easy to keep pace with the changing moods and possibilities of those to whom we must address the converting word. We have the Gospel of power and wisdom. The victory is won above before we enter the battle here. The triumph is ours in the eternal purpose before the first blow is struck. Age may dim the eye and weaken the voice, but every preacher may have lift in his feet and lilt in his faith as he moves to morrows of victory. He knows now and shall prove for ever.¹ “ And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

¹ Daniel xii. 3.

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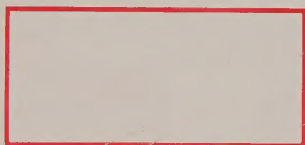
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